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Village Sketches

by

T.C. Whitehead


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VILLAGE SKETCHES

DESCRIPTIVE OF

CLUB AND SCHOOL FESTIVALS

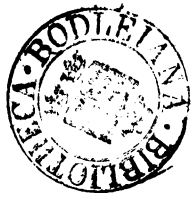
AND OTHER

VILLAGE GATHERINGS AND INSTITUTIONS

BY

T. C. WHITEHEAD, M.A.

INCUMBENT OF GAWCOTT, BUCKS



LONDON

BOSWORTH & HARRISON, 215 REGENT STREET

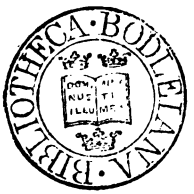
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NEW-STREET SQUARE



PREFACE.

THE following Sketches were written at intervals during the past year, and sent one by one to a friend who had applied to the Author for some account of his experience in the matters of which they treat. At the request of this friend, and of others who have read them, they are published in their present form, with the addition of "A Christmas Address" and "The Club Sermon."

The writer is conscious that they set forth the bright side of things. But, as far as they go, they are the literal truth. Wherever it has been possible he has given figures and numbers, and where he has encountered difficulty or failure it has been his wish not to conceal it.

Of course there is a dark side to every clergyman's work. But the reader will feel that it should not find a prominent place in Sketches like the present.

In one respect however the writer deems himself to have been fortunate. Allusion has been made to parishioners who have rendered him valuable help. He believes that there are such to be found in nearly every place, having indeed different talents, some one, some two, some more, and willing to employ them for the good of their fellow-creatures, if the spirit to do so be called forth. But in this instance the merit of having called it forth does not rest with himself. He thankfully acknowledges that it is his good fortune to follow and reap where others who bear a name honoured "in all the churches" have gone before and sown.

Gawcott Parsonage:
May 18, 1861.

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VILLAGE SKETCHES.

I.

WINTER EVENINGS.

A COUNTRY village as drawn from imagination by a poet, and a country village as it exists in real life, are two very different places. So I have discovered from living in a real country village for a considerable period of my life, during the last ten years of which I have been the clergyman of the one in which I now reside.

The village which is the centre of my present parish consists of a pretty cluster of cottages, with the usual thatched roof, and surrounded by tall elm trees. In the day time, when the men and boys are absent at work, and the children at school, when nothing is stirring but the smoke from the chimneys, and nothing heard but the sounds one reads of in a pastoral, a passing traveller might people it in his fancy according to the poet's dream. But of a winter's night, especially when the moon is bright, and the Corydons take to rough sports

in the open street (as it is called), he would hear most unpoetical sounds, and see most unpoetical behaviour. In fact the exceeding roughness and rudeness of the male population of a village, between the ages of about fourteen and two or three and twenty, is a well-known subject of complaint amongst all who are interested in our rural districts. They are in general thorough disturbers of the peace. They are too old for home restraint and discipline — which ceases (what little of it is practised at all) with the labouring classes at a very early age. They leave school at about eight, and their mental faculties are therefore very uncultivated; and having a certain amount of strength and animal spirits left to expend when they come home at night from work, they either go to the public-house and become more or less sots, or at the best are noisy and mischievous from sheer want of something to do.

In summer time this amount of extra steam requiring to be let off is less mischievous, because it finds proper safety-valves in the cricket-field and in the allotment grounds: but I need not dwell upon the difference between some twenty-five or thirty boys of various ages, from about twelve or fourteen upwards, cheerily and healthily employed in lawful games by daylight, with their elders and friends from time to time looking on, and the same number wandering about by dark in gangs, like the Mohawks of the "Spectator's" times in the unlit streets of London.

The clergyman therefore of a country village has the question repeatedly forced home upon his mind, "What can I do for and with these fellows to make them less a

nuisance to their neighbours, and to do a little good to themselves?"

In the ten years that I have been here, this question has over and over again recurred to me, and not without its setting me upon making attempts in all the usual directions. Of course during all that time I have had a night school, but with no other result than that of getting a few steady ones to attend, who for the most part fell off as they learned to write — the one thing which country boys and girls are always anxious to learn. I have also for several seasons had a course of lectures delivered by different friends on pleasant subjects; but although the audiences were large, and the lectures listened to with interest, still this did not seem to have any perceptible bearing upon the special "rough lot." It did not sufficiently *occupy their time.*

I determined last September, at the beginning of a new winter campaign, to try a different plan, and to establish

"*A Free and Easy Night Club.*"

A written notice was pasted against the barn wall in the centre of the village, which performs the useful part of being our public advertiser, to the following effect: — "A meeting will be held at the School-room, on Thursday evening, September 22nd, at 7.30, to talk about opening the School-room for the convenience of the people in the village during the winter months. The attendance of men and boys is requested."

Having explained my views to two or three of the leaders among the young men, we succeeded in getting

a good meeting, and of the very sort that I most wanted. There were from twenty-five to thirty present, when I took the opportunity of saying, that as the School-room was built solely for the benefit of the village, and not for my convenience, I looked upon myself as the trustee of the building for their advantage, and that I would hand over to them the room for as many nights during the winter as it would not be required for public purposes, i. e. for four nights during the week; the sole restrictions I should place upon them being, that they should not injure the property nor use it for such purposes as I should disapprove. I said that I looked to them to be the preservers of order and of the public property, and that I felt assured that I could trust them to do this. I offered to find firing and lights, so that there might be no difficulty on this score. The wages of our labourers are small, and therefore I felt it would be unwise to charge any price—at any rate in the first instance—before there had been created a *taste* for the article.

Whether it was on account of the free and easy appearance of the whole thing, and the absence of any kind of constraint over them or not, I cannot say, but the proposal was evidently relished from the first moment. I rather think that it *was* this absence of the "driving system" which made it take.

"I hear, sir," said an old man of the old school a day or two afterwards; "I hear, sir, that the boys are to do what they like in the school these winter evenings."

"Well," said I, "haven't they been doing what they like for these many years outside the school-room? and

isn't it worth while for once in a way to try what they will do inside it? Who knows but they may be quieter and better behaved?"

"I don't understand it, sir. I don't understand it at all."

But the boys did understand it, and have been understanding it now for the space of twenty-four weeks. We have just closed the room for the present season, having had, during all that period, an average of twenty-four present a night for the two hours during which the room has been open. Numerically, the success has been greater than I expected. In talking over the plan, when the room was first opened for this purpose, with a friend and fellow-workman in schemes of this nature, we agreed in thinking that an average of ten or twelve through the season might be considered a fair success.

To those unacquainted with country villages and the extreme difficulties of "getting the people in them out of their old ways" (especially that more unmanageable part of the community for whose benefit almost exclusively this Night Club was instituted), our success may seem no great thing after all; but I have learned not to despise the day of small things, and to believe that some of the most lasting influences are those that begin slowly and quietly, and proceed without fuss or noise, working no faster or farther than the leavening spirit can reach, but working therefore with inevitable power of increase from the reproductive nature of the life that is in them. Therefore it was not for the numerical success of our little village Night Club that I was chiefly

anxious. To find even eight or ten boys or young men who, night after night, during the long winter evenings would lift themselves so far above the habits of their class as to read in the village school-room, to play a quiet game, or even to sit round the fire and talk, would have been to sow a seed that *must* bear fruit in due time.

But the success (such as it has been) of our Night Club I attribute to one cause chiefly, and that is, *the absence of the authoritative element.* "The boys were to do what they liked;" and so, being troublesome at once lost full half its zest. They came themselves of a night for the keys of the school-room to my house, opened the room, lit the candles, and the fire, when it happened to be out, got out from the cupboards all the means of entertainment provided for them, and at the regular time closed the school, carefully putting by all the things of their own accord.

I attended the greater part of the nights during the winter; but I attended as *one of them.* I looked upon the room as theirs for the time being. If a little roughness went on I took no notice of it. I do not suppose I spoke three times during the six months by way of exercising the slightest authority. My province was to watch carefully the bent and inclination of their mind, and merely to provide what would naturally and easily keep them quiet and interest them. And this was a point upon which I must confess that I really was very much at sea.

About four or five years ago I started a nearly similar institution; but it fell almost still-born. I then found

candles, firing, books, and newspapers, and charged one penny a week to pay for the expenses of lighting, &c. (or rather to go towards them); but there was a very small attendance of steady men, and in about a fortnight, after a rough night or two, even they ceased to come. Moreover, it is not the quiet steady married men that one wants to get, drawing them out of their homes, but the rough fellows who will not stop at home. So I had to find out what would *take* with them, that my position as their minister could allow me to sanction. I was quite prepared to let down the longest ladder of junction between us that my conscience would permit. I therefore introduced into the club-room, beside two daily penny papers, and other papers and publications, various games, viz., dominoes, draughts, shepherd's chess, and regular chess. I say I was at sea when I first began as to what would interest them; and very much surprised I have been to find that though each of the other games has had its friends from time to time, the favourite pre-eminently has been chess. At first they were somewhat awkward at it, knocking down the pieces continually with their hands; but now, at the end of the season, they not only play neatly and sit quietly for an hour over a game, but are quite expert players. We have three sets of chessmen, and I am not aware that I have ever seen one of them not in use; and if I could have afforded to double the number of sets, I think they would seldom have been unoccupied. At first, being anxious to study economy, I bought a set of very neat wooden chessmen. The two other sets were bone, and coloured red and white; but it is well worthy of notice

that the wooden chessmen were *never used.* I suspected why, and had them exchanged for a bone set coloured red and white. These, from the first night they were brought in, were *never out of use.*

Out of the twenty, thirty, or even forty, who would sometimes be in the room together, they generally all found some employment; some played games, some looked on very much interested when a sharply-contested game of chess was being played, while some few came for the purpose of seeing the news, as regularly as a half-pay officer in a country town would look into the subscription news-room. The only times when there seemed any danger of the natural roughness coming out were when they were seated, a number of them together, round the fire doing nothing. The great object, therefore, was to give them all something to occupy them; and this was accomplished by the providing of various games, some of a very simple description. Even grown-up men were much interested by puzzles such as children put together; and I have seen six or eight (two or three out of the number being men) employed for upwards of an hour in arranging the various pieces. At different times they have had four such puzzles. At the close of the season the only thing missing is one piece belonging to one of the sets of chessmen. In arranging the room from the first for their accommodation, I carried out the principle of an ordinary club-room, and put three or four small tables in different parts of the room, round which separate groups might form.

For a certain time a singing-class, conducted by themselves, flourished, and was popular. Also in one part of

the school-room, which during class time was portioned off by a curtain, the ordinary night-school was conducted for three nights out of the four; and on the fourth, myself, or the same friend to whom I have before alluded, occasionally gave a lecture on some easy and familiar subject. The most popular lecture perhaps of the season was on "Rats." The subject was of such importance that it could only be done justice to in two lectures. The character of a "Free and Easy" was maintained throughout, and the audience was invited to ask questions during the lectures, or to tender information. As I was a theorist in the matter of rats, and my audience consisted of farmers' men and boys, who had considerable practical acquaintance with them, I was obliged to be careful how I got up my subject. The only thing I was really afraid of was that (the subject being known beforehand) a regular professional rat-catcher might have been introduced as a friend of some member of our "Free and Easy," when I should have been an impudent man if I had not felt abashed in the presence of such superior knowledge. Perhaps I should have been buoyed up by the feeling that knowledge ever makes more allowance than ignorance, knowing that it can afford to do so. But the dreaded *savant* never came — to my relief!

Nor did we in the course of the winter entirely neglect a little attention to other subjects. A kind scientific friend lent us an excellent telescope, and on a clear night we occasionally had a look at the moon, and at Jupiter with his satellites, and also at Saturn and Venus. A lecture on the Heavenly Bodies belonging to

our own system, simply stating the main features, distances, and sizes, and some few well-known facts, was thus pleasantly illustrated.

In this way then our boys "did what they liked" all through the winter nights: not the slightest constraint was put upon them; they came, or stopped away, read, played, or sat still and did nothing, just as they pleased. But what they did like was to leave the village quiet and peaceable; so much so, that the policeman who has been for years on our beat, unsolicited walked up to me, and said, "My work is gone, sir. I don't know why it is, but there is wonderful quietness and peace." What they did like to do was to leave their neighbours' gates hanging on their hinges, instead of putting them into the village pond, or on the top of the iron fencing outside the school-room. What they did like to do was, to attend the night school in twice the numbers they have ever attended it before, to sit as orderly as any gentlemen for two hours a night (without one oath or bad word that I or others have heard all the time), to attend the lectures, to play at chess and other games, to star-gaze a little bit, and to make every inhabitant of the village say, "There never was a better thing for our village than the Night Club." That is what, when left to their liking, and gently and unobtrusively helped, our village boys did like to do.

Let me, however, do my old friend the objector justice. He is a staunch supporter of all that he thinks right and good, and a great deal of quiet shrewd sense he has behind those arched eyebrows of his, and like a fair and impartial man, as he really is, he has looked in

upon us occasionally to see how we were "getting on." His own entertainment at the Free and Easy has been to read the day's paper, and "Stanley's Sinai and Palestine," which I brought to the school-room for his especial benefit. Also he was a steady attendant at the lectures.

One question caused me a little perplexity; and that was the advisability of allowing "smoking" in our Night Club. I came to the conclusion, after much reflection, to trust boldly to the principle to which I had committed myself and leave it to the lads themselves. The result justified my confidence. Now and then at distant intervals a pipe would be lit and smoked; but these exceptions were very rare. A double benefit was thereby gained. The exceptions showed the thorough freedom allowed. The abstinence from what with most of them is a regular indulgence, both showed and exercised self-restraint of the most wholesome kind, that caused by a voluntary and respectful deference to the feelings of others.

In the course of the winter, now and then a pleasant and general chat arose on points touching closely on the labourer's character and habits — such as smoking — beer-drinking — penny banks, &c.; and what I felt when sitting on a bench by their side, and hearing their free and unfettered expressions was, that they were got nearer to in that way, as touching these points, than could have been effected by the most able and convincing sermon. Man was speaking to man, and friend taking counsel with friend.

The writer of this little account of a village Night Club makes no pretension to any discovery. He has

only done one winter what he has failed to do for nine winters before it, and he might fail the next, should he live to see it, even in the same scheme. But he seems to have got a further insight into one truth — which he has been slowly, too slowly, learning for years past—viz., that influence over the human heart depends far more upon sympathy than upon the exercise of authority, and that the teacher has himself much to learn patiently and humbly even from the rudest of those whom he would teach.

II.

THE CHILDREN'S LIBRARY.

WHEN I first entered upon my present charge, there was a lad in the village, such as is to be found, I suppose, in most villages, more actively and impudently troublesome than any of the rest; but, as is sometimes the case with a ringleader in boyish mischief, he was intelligent in no common degree, and by no means badly disposed or vicious. It was not difficult, by handling him with patience and temper, being careful not to drive him into confirmed opposition, and biding one's opportunity, to get on friendly terms with such a lad; and an opportunity occurring one day, I lent him a very amusing book out of my study. When he brought the book back, we easily slid into a pleasant chat upon what he had been reading; and one thing led to another in conversation, until I contrived to send him away this time, not with a story book, but with a History of England. It was the starting-point of a new existence to him, the opening of a new world. The Histories of Greece and Rome, and other standard books, were borrowed and diligently

read. His old companions were left, and his habits entirely changed. About three years ago he married, and went to Australia, and his letters home — written with clear manly sense, and full of shrewd remarks on the people, produce, and peculiarities of his adopted country — show a well-directed and not uncultivated mind. I do not wish to make too much of the irregular education which he thus received, but it assuredly had much to do with bringing about this happy result. Being very intelligent, some other influence might perhaps have given a turn to his mind, even if he had not had access to the shelves of my library; but this much at least I may say, that from the time he read the books thus provided, he was an altered lad.

The success of this plan with this boy suggested to me the advisability of occasionally doing the same in the case of other boys; and so, from that time, I have never been without similar visitors. One boy, in particular, I treated in this way — a sharp little fellow who happened to be exposed to greater temptations than our boys are usually placed under at the same age. He seemed, in consequence, very much in danger of going wrong. For him I baited with a very telling book, both inside and out (pictures and very pleasant reading, in rather a pretentious binding), off my children's shelves. I gave him very particular orders, as the book was much valued, to keep it clean. The book, when it was returned, was neatly covered with part of an old newspaper. Another was asked for, which was lent with similar orders, and returned with equal care. And so on with another and another, until, on many a winter's

night, Georgy H—— would sit and read pleasant tales of home and foreign lands to his little brothers and sisters as they sat together round the fire. I say to his little brothers and sisters, but I suspect Georgy's father was not the least attentive listener of the party. He follows the plough, and earns his eleven shillings a week; and if you were to see the rough ploughman (rough as far as his dress goes) coming home in his dirty smock and heavy boots after his weary work, you would little guess what his employment often is before he goes to bed. I am sorry I cannot now lay my hand on his first letter in print that came under my notice. It was an appeal to the irregular sportsmen of the neighbourhood to spare the blackbird and the thrush that cheer the labourer with their song as he goes to his work, written in pure English, and with a simple pathos which showed that under the smock was a heart full of tenderness of feeling and delicacy of thought.

I contrived to ask Georgy some questions from time to time about his book, and his coming to my house to change it, before the other boys in the afternoon Sunday-school. As I expected, this caused another boy to ask for the same privilege. I made a little difficulty about granting it, but allowed it to him at last. Then a third applied, finding that it was a privilege to be gained, and not an authority to be resisted, until, a kind of reading epidemic breaking out, there were soon about half a dozen candidates at once for admission to my private circulating library. "Upon this hint," as Othello said, "I spake," and recommended the formation of a society amongst themselves of those *who really wished to read.*

I advised these half dozen to form themselves into a small club, and to admit into it only such fresh members as really *meant reading*, on the ground that others would be more likely to bring weakness than strength into their little society.

This new society was grafted on to the old privilege in this way. I selected about forty books belonging to my children, most of them with pictures, and some of them very amusing, and lent them on condition of their being taken care of and returned as soon as the society should have purchased books enough of its own for circulation amongst its members. Members rapidly joined. Organisation soon became necessary. Two books now lie by my side as I write; one is headed, "Minutes, Rules, &c., of School Library," on the first page of which I see a string of officers, beginning with president and ending with librarian; the other is the Treasurer's Account Book, showing a balance at present in our favour of 1*l.* 13*s.* 9½*d.*

The number of members now belonging to the library is between 60 and 70, and they possess nearly 200 books. The 40 lent in the first instance have been long since returned to the original lenders with a very superior note of thanks, which cost the committee of management no small pains to compose, and a graceful offer in return of the use of any of the books which are now the property of the society. The 200 have been purchased by the subscriptions of the members. But we were not above receiving a trifling donation of a shilling, or half-a-crown, or of a pleasant book from any neighbour interested in our proceedings. We are

not too proud to accept assistance; but we *depend only upon ourselves.*

The management is vested in a committee of twelve boys. All rules, even if not framed by them, are sanctioned by them. The money is collected and expended, books exchanged, and accounts kept, by themselves. We meet, the twelve committee-*men* (the eldest of whom is about fifteen years old), myself, and a valued fellow-workman, who would be angry with me if I told at length how large a share he has in the success of our plans, in a little room hardly large enough to hold us. Copies of the *Illustrated Times* and other illustrated publications lie upon the table to beguile the intervals of business and to afford subject of conversation and entertainment before we begin. And very business-like we are, I can assure you. I only wish you could peep through a hole in the warm-looking curtain, when we are assembled on important matters on some winter's evening. Talk of a committee in a metropolitan vestry, or any of those grand places, where weighty discussions are held round solid oak tables! I know they look very imposing. Such committees are serious things enough; but if you really wish to see in perfection the conscious air of dignity and responsibility which office can bestow, you should look in some night at about eight o'clock, when our committee have come in from their labours at the plough or in the farm-yard. They like meeting for business; and a marked influence is produced upon them by the habit of doing so. The voluntary engagement strictly kept, the necessary order enforced in deliberation, the appeal to

their opinion, the constant exercise of their own judgment, together with now and then the just and firm infliction of a penalty, have decidedly tended to foster self-respect in these boys.

While, however, the main feature of our children's library is its independent action and freedom from that extraneous assistance which is sometimes found or imagined to be necessary for the support of such institutions, one thing I ought in fairness to state, and that is, that two or three little entertainments have been given to the committee by way of friendly hospitality in that small room of which I have spoken. One night we gave them some bread and cheese and beer. On another occasion they were invited to tea. And on a third we had a supper. This last *was* a feast! Goose, roast pork, and plum-pudding! What shall I say in excuse for all this? It seems a sad interference with the self-supporting and independent nature of the institution. I had sundry misgivings in my mind as to the wisdom of these proceedings. They did not, however, materially affect the regular working of the library; for out of nearly seventy members, only the twelve on the committee shared in the treats. If they had any effect at all it was a prejudicial one; for two members not on the committee withdrew from the library, because they were not invited to the supper. True, as we all agreed, that by the defection of such members as Dick R—— and Tom H—— no loss was sustained on either side; for *we* lost no real strength, and *they* lost little reading, I imagine. But the incident served to show that a disturbing element was intro-

duced by the treats. Still I am afraid, if I have erred, that I may err again. Judgment, that stern monitor, may say, No! but when I think of that evening, and those twelve faces shining with delight, and how we did enjoy ourselves round that goose, and what jokes we cracked upon it; and when I think how little the lot of those toiling hard-fed boys is diversified by such pleasant scenes, Judgment, Judgment, I am afraid!

In the month of June the members fall off; and it is intended they should do so. Shaping ourselves to circumstances, we divide during the summer months into a Library and a Cricket Club; and a member may (upon paying threepence entrance money) have his library subscription go during the summer towards the cricket, or continue on with the library, or pay to and have the benefit of both. Very few, however, do the last. There are twenty members of the cricket club, and about thirty continue their reading. Then we begin again with new life at Michaelmas, or a little after. We call a committee meeting, consider the plan of our winter campaign, see what funds we have in hand, and lay out what we can spare in a new lot of books.

It is well, I am sure, from time to time to infuse fresh blood into the society by the purchase of new books, even if, to make room for them, we turn out some of the old ones; no matter how good they may be, if for some reason they *do not take*, it is better to turn them out. What is the use of keeping them? It is in favour of the library if a child knows that it can hardly drop upon a book that is not readable and interesting. The better to contrive this, without having all

the books of too light a character, we have adopted the expedient of arranging our catalogue under three heads or classes. Class A. contains entertaining books, such, for instance, as "Robinson Crusoe" (always popular), "The Swiss Family Robinson," "Charlie Burton," &c. &c. Under Class B. are ranged books of a more solid character, biographies, travels, &c. Class C. contains only religious books. But we find that the books soon get a character; and the favourite works with us have their expectants waiting two, three, or four deep for them, just as in large libraries the subscribers have their names down for Macaulay or Livingstone. We bought a book in two volumes, lent to us at first by a little village boy. It became very popular, and is always out. We soon had to send it to have a cheap strong binding. I more than suspect, however, that the name of the work has something to do with the secret of its popularity; and yet it must have real merit in the eyes of our little critics, or it would have been condemned by this time. Impostors may run short course, but they get found out at last.

I aim, in these papers, at little more than a statement of facts. The principal fact with regard to our children's library is this, that upwards of sixty children have so far acquired a habit of reading, and like it for the pleasure which it affords them, that they willingly pay their subscriptions, buy their own books, and take the trouble to change them when necessary. For weeks together one little boy, fourteen years of age, one of themselves, transacts all the business; he puts the books out, takes the money, enters on the register the books

returned and taken out, and gives advice to inquiring juveniles who want assistance in making their choice. The children would not do all this unless the reading were a positive pleasure to them. *They take the books because they want them; and they read them when they have taken them.* Why? I believe chiefly for two reasons. One, because they have such works as interest them; and the other, because they have the supreme pleasure of managing their own affairs. Our committee-meetings have much to do with keeping alive the spirit of the concern. We are going to hold one to-night at eight o'clock. Doubtless we shall transact important business.

III.

TEA PARTIES.

THOUGH I speak only as a village clergyman, and though it is among simple rustics that my lot is cast, yet, when I do catch here and there a glimpse of other portions of that great world of which we form so infinitesimal a portion, I feel that the same human hearts beat under smock-frocks that lie underneath all other coats and dresses, and that the *principles* of dealing with men in every age and state are the same. It is possible then that even we villagers, taking a homely tea together, may have been illustrating social principles that have to do with all mankind. So much may the *application* of them vary that, in the very next village to our own, local circumstances might prevent exactly the same plan succeeding. The method of carrying out the principles might require to be changed; but the principles themselves never vary.

Well, what principle is illustrated in these Tea Parties? — The same as I ventured to suggest was illustrated in the schemes which I have already

described, viz., that it is better, where one can do so, to stand back and help people to do right, and put them quietly in the way of carrying out right aims themselves, than to manage everything for them by authority: since in the latter case mere temporary outside success is achieved, while in the former a lasting effect is left on character. And of this little service it is just possible that these stray papers may be. They may perchance fall into the hands of some one much abler than I am, equally or more anxious for his people's good, and suggest to him that admirable plans may fail from the simple fact that *they do not leave enough for others to do.* Many a clergyman might be the better for a visit from some Jethro, who would suggest to him that it would be "easier for himself that some amongst his people should bear the burden with him," and that, by this means, while he is spared, resources in them unknown hitherto both to them and to himself might be called into pleasurable and healthy exercise. Sure I am, that had I from first to last been the sole planner and executor of our Village Teas, they would in every way have lacked the spirit and success which marked them. But many other heads and hands were employed in devising and carrying them out. The chief manager however of the whole was Hannah B——. At our first gathering, out of a population of 600, 230 took tea; but there was no press, no hurry; everybody was waited on; everybody had abundance and was satisfied; and yet Hannah was not heard, and scarcely seen. I have often observed in persons who have large administrative

powers a particularly quiet way. Everything is provided, every one knows his own work, nothing is forgotten, and the only person who seems to have nothing to do is the manager of the whole. They are something like the old four-in-hand coachmen. While some laborious cockney on the road driving a miserable pony had both his hands more than full, coachee would drive by, his reins dangling in one hand, and himself talking to the box passenger, scarcely seeming to heed the spanking team he was driving.

I had but recently discovered the talent of Hannah; or rather it had discovered itself. We country parsons are proverbially slow and cautious. We are not given to rash and dangerous experiments. We are rather like elephants, which are said to have a dislike to enter a stream where they cannot see the bottom, and make each step safe as they go. With characteristic caution then for more than five years did I revolve in my mind the idea of an occasional monster Village Tea, in which, without respect to such distinctions of class and rank as we have amongst us, we all might now and then take a friendly and sociable meal together. I did not clearly see my way to success, and the scheme was of such a nature that anything short of thorough success would be failure. Merely to give notice of such a scheme would assuredly not bring the people together with one mind and accord; nor would it be an easy thing to rouse that interest and spirit which are necessary to make a good holiday. Patiently therefore I waited and watched the current of circumstances. So watching and waiting, a copy of our local newspaper, printed at the town

nearest to our village, came into my hands while I was away from home, taking necessary rest from labour. Glancing carelessly down the pages of the little publication, my eye rested suddenly on a paragraph which interested me greatly. It was to the effect that from 80 to 100 of the labourers and their wives and children belonging to the village of G—— took tea one autumn evening in an adjoining wood; that they had provided themselves with abundance of bread and butter and cakes; and that after a very pleasant and sociable evening thus spent together, they separated for their various homes.

"Who," I asked, soon after my return home, "was the manager of that tea party?"

"Hannah B——," was the ready reply.

Here was a step gained. One of the villagers was found, accustomed to the work, who had the confidence of her neighbours, and who could set the work going amongst themselves entirely.

"I think, sir," said Hannah, as I called at her cottage, "that the men and boys are so comfortable at the Night Club, that there ought to be something done for the women-folk. I *peeked* in the other night through the window blinds at the school, and I came back and asked our Tom to come and look. They all did look so comfortable."

"Well, Hannah, it is only right of you to put in a word for your own sex. What I should wish is to see the labourer's wife, or sister, or daughter, more mixed up with his pleasures and his holiday-making. But

what can we do? That, by the way, was a good idea of yours — that tea party at the wood."

"Well, sir, we did enjoy ourselves unaccountably *in our way*."

"Well, then, couldn't you do something in the same way — have a pleasant tea of your own — during these dark evenings?"

"Where, sir?"

"Why, in the school-room to be sure. I don't mind your having it for your tea; only don't look to me to do anything more than just come in as one of you. I and my family will come and take tea with you. But you must not depend upon me for getting the thing up; and let us have a good tea."

That same evening Hannah and a friend went round to every house in the village; and the thing was done. It was the people's tea. All could go to Hannah's little shop and talk it over, and suggest, advise, or offer assistance. All were interested in it. Every grown-up person who could find sixpence, and every boy or girl who could get a spare threepence, was soon provided with a ticket for the great tea on Monday evening.

All service was gratuitous, and well and heartily was it rendered. It was interesting to watch how every point was thought of, and every obstacle or difficulty foreseen, every want supplied, every waiter in his or her place. Our friends were like a well-ordered hive of bees all the day before the tea came off — some fetching tables — some setting them — some struggling under loads of cups and saucers — others with groceries,

loaves, and cakes — all busy, and all with faces smiling in expectation of the treat.

Every one who has had to do with large tea parties knows that a sufficient supply of hot water is the great difficulty. Our school-room being at some distance from any house, and no one house being able to keep up a sufficient supply, a very simple but excellent plan was devised. A long iron bar was procured, and two short stakes, each about two-and-a-half feet high, being driven into the ground near the school-room, the iron bar was rested on them, and from it the kettles were suspended on butcher's hooks over a faggot fire. In this way, and by resting other kettles on the edge of the fire, from fifteen to twenty kettles were kept constantly at work, and an ample supply of hot water procured. For each of the duties of keeping up the fire, filling the kettles with cold water, and carrying in the hot water, as for every other post, I found that fit persons had been selected and set apart. Our hive of bees understood the principle of subdivision of labour.

Not all the 230 took tea at the same time. At half-past four about eighty sat down, consisting of those who were set apart to wait at the great tea, and such of the children and women as could not come out later in the evening. The remaining 150 took their tea at half-past six. Our school-room is fifty feet long by eighteen feet broad; and how they were all accommodated, with room in addition for very many waiters, was then a mystery to me, and is so still.

But the time comes when even the camel has taken in his supply of water, and the purchaser of a sixpenny

ticket for tea considers that he has had a good bargain. This time came to us at about a quarter to eight. I then offered, as one of the company, in default of any other member of it having a better proposal, to read for a short time. The proposal being gladly accepted, I read some short pieces of poetry, and among the rest the inimitable ballad of "The Miller's Wife." I know not how this ballad might affect an audience of high degree; but I have tried it three or four times on different audiences among the simple and the rustic, and I have never seen words go home more straight to the heart. The shriek of delight at certain quaint rustic bits in the ballad, and the visible softening of the countenance, and the gulp in the throat, as the strain changed to pathos, and the shades of sorrow were described as falling on the humble home of Annie and John, testified plainly to the power which Mary Sewell wields over the rustic heart. But it would never do to read long. So next a song from some rustic musicians of the party; and then from the whole room solemnly rises the well-known Evening Hymn.

And "Now for the balloons! Who wants to see the balloons go up?" and in five minutes, and much less, the fresh living air is blowing pleasantly through the open windows of the empty room. Capital ascents! and away go the balloons with full as much applause as ever Mr. Green achieved.

By this time it is past nine o'clock, time for the older and graver members of the community to go home, while the younger return into the now cooled room.

No further difficulty about finding amusement—

little to do, but to sit quietly down and see how bountifully the Great Author of our being has provided means within our own selves of simple and innocent pleasure. At ten they sang "God save the Queen" of their own accord, and left in high glee.

"Never had such a holiday before, sir!" "Never had a better holiday in my life, sir!" was the ready acknowledgment for many days after, without exception, of young and old.

And so ended Tea Party No. 1. No, not exactly, for next morning I superintended, in the cottage which had been our head-quarters, the distribution of the fragments — tea, sugar, and twelve quartern loaves — to the sick, widows, and aged, sixteen of whom had no cause to regret the enjoyment of the young and strong and healthy, from which sorrow or old age had excluded them.

It may interest some of my readers to learn that after all was paid for, balloons and all (for we accepted no gifts, except actual help and assistance), and after a liberal gift was made to the needy, there remained a surplus of five shillings, which I paid into our penny bank, to go towards the next treat of the same kind.

This Second Tea came off three months after. It had its little variations from the first. We were more extravagant; for having a fund of five shillings in hand, we had a grand exhibition of fireworks. When all was paid this time our surplus for the bank was tenpence.

These village entertainments have helped me to understand the superior value of *moral* over *material* help. To give 5*l.* to provide a neighbourhood with

such a meal as I have described our taking together, might be from a rich man a pleasant and a graceful act. But to encourage a neighbourhood to organise their own social gathering; to draw out the resources and the powers of very many who hardly knew what they could do till, as the familiar saying is, they try; to lead them to make common sacrifices and vigorous united efforts; to bind them up, entirely of their own accord, master and man, rich and poor, at a common board, where none eat the bread of dependence, and none dispense the bread of patronage; is to provide a feast of the cheapest kind, for the poorest may contrive it, and of the richest kind, for mind and heart benefit from it more than body.

Here is a principle capable of extension far beyond a village tea meeting, viz., that the power which sets people to work should come rather *from within* than *from without*.

IV.

OUR CLUB.

WE have a friendly club in our village for the relief of labouring men in sickness. It has been established six years.

Once a year, like most clubs of the kind, its members and their friends meet for a holiday. Our last holiday was on Wednesday, the 23rd of May. And a pleasant holiday we had.

"Our club" is prospering.

I wish the young yew-trees which I planted some time ago in front of my study-window would do what the club seems to be doing—i. e. "get holt of the ground," as the people in these parts say. One of them is a beautiful copper-colour from top to bottom. My gardener says it is alive, and will do when it has "got holt." Our club seems to have passed this critical stage (for it, too, as I shall have occasion to say, has been transplanted); it seems to have taken root and to be putting forth green and vigorous branches. Ten new members entered on the feast-day. There are rumours

of more about to enter. Neighbours ask for its rules. Friends come to dine with us. Some who have been asked and have not come express their intention to come another year. Others hint that they would like to be asked. Signs, these, of having "got holt!" It would not surprise me, when I see the reputation the club is getting and the spirit which animates it, if at some future day it gained an importance its founders did not contemplate.

It was founded by the working men of the village themselves, and, like most such clubs, at a public-house.

I had long wanted to see some such a club established. There were local circumstances, into which I need not enter, which had caused me to hesitate in originating one myself. It was better, as it turned out, that I did not.

The club started strong in numbers. It transacted a deal of business, if the number of committee-meetings it held might be taken as a test; but as twelve quarts of beer (a quart for each member of committee present or absent), to be paid for out of the sick-fund, was a standing rule, "the Chequers," as might be expected, prospered at the expense of the club.

A year had passed away when, in accordance with the usual village custom, the officers of the club came to ask me to open the church and preach to them on their first feast-day.

"With all my heart," was my answer; "and in anything I say to you I shall not offend you if I can help it. But if you seek my advice I shall give it you honestly. I am very glad to see you anxious to be

united and provident; but if I think you going the wrong way in your endeavours, I shall plainly tell you so."

The officers shook their heads, and asked time for deliberation. Another committee was held, and twelve more quarts of beer drunk, to consider my reply, and I received a respectful message to the effect that "it had been the wish of the committee to pay the preacher a guinea, but they thought they ought not to pay to be found fault with; that if I thought it a duty therefore to speak my mind, I ought to do it for nothing."

This was a bargain I readily consented to, the more readily that I should under no circumstances have taken the guinea; and I did speak my mind.

The result was that in the year following the "Chequers" was deserted, and the club was transplanted. The matter was settled by ballot. There were forty-two members, and all were present. Number *for* removing the club to the school-room at G——, and holding the committee-meetings without beer, 41; *against*, 1. Of course the solitary non-consenting bean was not the landlord's!

And thus the club came under my care. It was their own act entirely.

I started with a determination to act upon one principle to the uttermost—viz., to trust the men themselves—honestly believing that in this largely lies the secret of right dealing with the working classes of England, either in town or country. *They will trust those who trust them;* and if they find them capable of directing them and willing to do so disinterestedly, that trust will be almost unbounded.

Recognising, therefore, as the basis of our co-operation the right of the members of the society to manage their own affairs, and giving them credit for willingness to listen to what they should at any time consider to be good advice, I took them just as they were.

One protest, however, I did feel bound to make. I have a great objection to what are called "seven years' clubs;" and I explained that unless a guarantee were given to members entering the club against a periodical division of the profits (the very bank upon which they are to fall back to fulfil their engagements with new and young members), the satisfaction which I should have in being their president would be greatly diminished.

At once, and unanimously, a stringent rule upon the subject was passed.

Four years ago this took place.

Our first feast day was a very rough affair. With the exception of a dinner which I once ate in a foreign town, where the knives and forks were chained to the table, and where the principal food was tough goat's flesh, I never saw things put on in a rougher way. Not that there was any lack of expense. Our dinner cost as much in proportion to the numbers that day as it did last May, but you would not have recognised the room, the dinner, nor the men—so much difference is there in the way of doing things. And that has been one great benefit of the club. It has educated the men. "We have been always learning lessons, sir," said one of them to me; "it has been a schooling to us."

On the first occasion of our dining together, the

stewards and other officers were evidently going to run to me for everything, upon finding which I told them the following story:—

A gentleman whom I knew married a wife. Shortly after their marriage, he invited a party of friends to dinner. The young wife, in utter helplessness, went to her husband to know how every part of the entertainment was to be managed. "My dear," was all the encouragement she received, "I have my duties to attend to, and you have yours. I never intended, when I married, to see to the housekeeping. Do the best you can. You'll learn in time." How the first dinner party went off I do not know; but this I know, that now the lady in question is one of the best of housekeepers and managers.

I acted on this principle. I declined to do more than superintend, on each Monday fortnight before the feast-day, the arrangements laid before me on paper point by point. And remarkably well they are now laid before me, with not a detail missing. The plan of throwing them on their own resources has answered.

The same plan is adopted on committee-nights. The business to be transacted is arranged in order upon paper. It is talked over for some time before I enter. In every immaterial point I confine myself to taking the sense of the committee. I seldom express an opinion but upon questions materially affecting the interests of the club. Then I sum up as fairly as I can the arguments which have been (or which I think might be) adduced on both sides. And my experience of them is, that labouring men, if accustomed to be dealt

with in this way, are as quick to see what is just or prudent or business-like or liberal as any set of gentlemen I ever sat amongst.

Let me give a specimen of the way in which they decide their matters.

A member last year was troublesome at the dinner-table. Not the "wine" but the beer "was in," and "the wit was out." The club felt he had disgraced them. He would keep his hat on; he would make noisy and uncalled-for remarks; he would insist upon offering to fight some of the company. Nor could he have been got out without making a great commotion; so he was left in this state at the table. On the 23rd of May last that member was the stillest man in all the room. "Whoever gets drunk this year," said he, "I don't." Not he! He remembered that nine shillings which he was fined at the next committee-meeting. Each member of committee wrote privately on a slip of paper, after the case had been patiently investigated, the amount which he thought the offender should be fined, and I added up the sums and took the average. I thought the fine heavy; but it was inflicted quietly and kindly by his fellow-labourers, and I can answer for it, most beneficially.

For another case which has occurred this time I am very sorry. I was sorry for Mat when he was fined nine shillings. But I am more sorry for Harry S——. I feel something like a commander who finds an offender in a gallant soldier, and who is called upon to degrade where he looked to praise and reward. Harry S—— is our standard-bearer! Harry is the man who bears all

through the day that splendid purple and orange flag which we bought last year at the cost of seven guineas. He has borne the flag from the very first. You should see his face as he is gently waving it to and fro, or holding it in the gallery, as the members file out of church under the massive folds of their own banner. On the feast-day morning some one had remarked to me, as the band came marching on and the really beautiful flag floated out as though in proud and conscious answer to the music, "That man would almost die for that flag!" And to think that the only offence I should see on the business-paper for the ensuing committee-night should be "to consider the case of Harry S——, who offered to fight two or three brother members, and to destroy the flag." Destroy the flag! Harry S—— destroy that flag? I think I could almost believe anything after that. "And he," said the secretary, as he showed me the paper, "as quiet as a child when he is not put up."

I heard of nothing else to mar in the least the good humour of the day.

Happily the day was fine; and when I looked out on the grey morning at about half-past six o'clock, I knew that a party of young active fellows had been up nearly three hours, and that probably a fine young oak, which had been given them at the wood, was by this time spreading its leafy arms in the school-yard, as though it had been growing there from the time it was an acorn. Sure enough when I went round before breakfast there was the oak thick enough, especially with the help of lilac boughs and crab-blossoms, to have hidden King

Charles, crown and all, as well as he is generally hidden in the various Royal Oaks on the signs of public-houses. I gently expostulated on the peculiarity of lilac-blossoms growing on an oak-tree; but I was answered immediately, and silenced by the case of the mistletoe; so I walked on into the school-room.

Busy hands and contriving heads were there, and a marvellous contrast to the old style of four years ago now presented itself to my notice. Scarcely could a room be set out in better taste. From the skylights the light descended mellowed through appropriate transparencies. Fitting mottoes in many-coloured letters, with gold and silver spangles, decorated the walls; and, not to notice many a smaller matter, groups of flowers in bowls and vases, and exquisite floral devices, such as might have adorned the costliest banquet, lent a charm of peculiar grace and beauty to the table. Most of these groups, showing how much may be done by the artistic use of simple means, were composed of wild flowers which the men had themselves brought home on their return from work from the woods and fields.

But how came this great difference, in so short a time, even in the appearance of the room? Chiefly, I believe, from the fact that "our club" is not a cut-and-dried institution applied from without, so much as an institution growing up from within. Everybody seems interested in it; nobody knows exactly how change after change takes place; but here a hint is given, and there a fault is remedied, and fresh friends and helpers

join and bring us strength, and so we mend as we go on, and get better and better. Our growth, like that of our bodies, seems to come natural. But come how it may, it is pleasant; and when we sat down to dinner this 23rd of May, there must have glowed, I think, in the bosom of many a member of "our club" an undefined feeling of self-respect when he saw in what style, and at his own expense, once a year he dines. Rudely enough he may dine three hundred and sixty-four days in the year; but once a year he sits down at a table of his own, at which he is proud to ask the gentlemen who are his neighbours to give him their company.

Last year we had our kind-hearted member, Sir Harry V—— amongst us, and we well knew this time that it was not lack of will on his part that deprived us of an honour which we value, not so much because he is Sir Harry V—— of C—— House, but because he is a good kind neighbour, and an English gentleman at heart.

Sir Harry did not forget us, though he was absent. The dispute between Lords and Commons did not so entirely occupy his thoughts, but that he found time to show a kindly remembrance of the club. About ten his keeper arrived with a dish of fish for the table. The men were pleased with the compliment.

"Don't forget to take care of the keeper," was my remark to the stewards, who were seated at an extempore business-place taking money and giving checks and tickets in an old barn near the school-room; "don't forget to take care of the keeper!"

"He is having his lunch, sir."

"That's right; but had you not better acknowledge him with a shilling?"

"It is a long ride, sir; we thought we had better make it two."

But I must leave the stewards and the keeper, for time is getting on. I see the preacher with a rosette as big as a sunflower fastened to his coat, and I must get mine on and see the men file into church. Two and two in orderly rank they come, with staves and rosettes, and their officers at their side, the band playing, and the purple and orange banner above their heads. They take their seats in the church, the band in the gallery on one side the organ, Harry S—— supporting the pole of the flag on the other, the members occupying all the front part of the centre of the church below.

The sermon, though written for the occasion, the text (Matthew xxi. 28, 29, 30, 31) being taken from the second lesson for the day, did not contain any special allusion to the club as a club. To some listeners it might perhaps have seemed to deal too much with the inner workings of the character for the class to whom it was addressed. It touched largely upon the dealings of parents with their children, especially their management of such as, with stubborn tempers and dispositions naturally reserved, are inclined to disobedience. But the truth is that the right understanding of this kind of sermon depends far more upon sympathy than upon intelligence—at least the intelligence which is the result of what is commonly called education. You may talk and preach about the form-

ation of character and the motives of human nature to some men who have had the best education, and they understand you about as well as if you talked to them in an unknown language. *It is* to them an unknown language. What know they of lessons of patience to be learned from their own children, or stubbornness to be subdued by their own self-control? But I watched those men listening; I could see them from the reading-desk. Of course some of the boys were not listening. It was not so much a subject for them. They were thinking of the dinner, and the supper, and the band. It is no use supposing they were not, for they were. But I watched some of the men. There were fathers there who could feel as sensitively for all that concerned their children as any fathers in the land, and I saw the changing expressions play across their faces like clouds and sunshine across a landscape.

"Did you understand the sermon this morning, John?" I said to one.

"Yes, sir; a deal too well."

The man has only two children; two boys, about eight and nine years old, the pride of his heart. Those boys had taught him to understand the sermon.

"Well, Johnson" (I change the name), I said to another, "you had an old friend in the pulpit to-day. We like old friends, you know; they are better than new ones."

"Ah, sir! I could look him in the face last year. But as soon as he began this year, it was all over with me; I could not look up at him at all—every word seemed written for me."

Johnson is not a parishioner of mine, and I know nothing of his domestic circumstances; but the man spoke in a tone and showed an emotion (for the tears ran down his face) that led me to inquire about him afterwards, and I found that he had lately had much trouble with his family. Where the fault lay it is not for me to pretend to say, but poor Johnson had understood the sermon, and in one sense it had spoilt his feast-day.

But to the dinner:—yes, *the* dinner! If you and I, sir, had only one good dinner in the year; only one at which we had just what we liked, and plenty of it — if all the other days we toiled hard and lived hard too— and if then we not only had a superb dinner, but perfect ease and leisure to enjoy it, and a band to play to us all the while,—do you not think that, in our estimation, it would quite deserve the distinctive title of *the* dinner?

Well, there are some things that the pen cannot do justice to. I really cannot describe the dinner; I feel I should be foolish to attempt it. Come yourself, reader, next May. One friend, a stranger to us till then, came this last time seventy miles, simply for the pleasure of seeing how we spent our holiday: and if you can give us as sound advice in as pleasant language as he did both after dinner and supper, you will be welcome indeed. But don't stop away because you are not a speaker like Mr. M——. If you will bring with you a kind heart and a friendly face, we will find a place for you, even if we have to squeeze closer to do it. We will make room for friends of that sort. We don't want too many orators.

One of the most telling speeches I ever heard at our club dinners was made two years ago by as honest a fellow as lives, with a face that it would do you good to look at. I put him up to reply to the toast of "The working man," thinking that in his honest way he would be not unlikely to make an effective speech. And so he did, but of a different kind from what I intended. When he got on his legs he stood for a little time, and then he said—

"I thought before I got up I had plenty to say. But I can't say it; it's all gone. But my heart's full and I thank you; and it will *do me more good* to have broken down than to have made a fine speech!"

Sit down, Ben! You need not make fine speeches! For many years you had two old women in your house, one always insane, both so lately, with only you and Mary your wife to tend them, without a murmur, through weary nights and painful days. One of them begged hard that you would not let her be sent to the union, and she is with you now. You and I, Ben, and Mary, stood over the grave of the other not a week before the feast-day. She was the one that had been always mad, but not so mad but that she had sense enough to feel your kindness. Most energetically did she say to me, not long ago, her dark eyes flashing earnestly as she spoke in her mad way—"Ben B—— is a good young man, sir. I respect him, sir; I do respect that young man."

And so do we, Esther. We respect all men that do things like that. We don't care whether they can make speeches or not; and very often they are just the men that can't make them at all.

I said that I should not attempt to describe the dinner; but one little matter let me mention, as showing how, year by year, the members of the club are beginning to attend to those external proprieties which mark the growth of self-respect, and react upon it.

Mr. M——, who addressed them extremely well both at the dinner and afterwards in the evening, skilfully took advantage of the fact that the knives had all the mark "G—— Club" stamped upon the blade. These knives and forks were a new investment this year. They were ordered from the manufacturer at Birmingham, and the committee had the quickwittedness to think of having their own mark stamped upon them. These things may seem trifles, but they have their effect. They help to create an *esprit de corps*.

So, when the stewards went to purchase the new table-cloths this year, they rejected the common material which was first offered to them. "We are not a seven years' club," they said, "and so we want the best material. It will have to *stand some wear*."

"Oh," said the liberal draper, "yours is not a seven years' club. Then I shall be happy to present you with a donation if you will accept it; but if you divided your profits I would not give you a sixpence."

Accordingly he sent us a donation of ten shillings on the feast-day, with a note expressing his regret that business deprived him of the pleasure of dining with us.

The supper, however, rather than the dinner, is becoming the chief entertainment of the day. Experience has shown that the men are simply bent in the middle

of the day upon making a thoroughly good dinner, and then going out to enjoy themselves after their own fashion. They do not want to sit prim and on their best behaviour to hear speeches for two or three hours. What they like is to accompany the band round the village, and to sit out of doors and listen to its cheerful music. But it is different at night. Let them then "light up," give them from time to time a pleasant song either from some member of the band or some one of their own members, and keep them listening to genial speeches, and they will sit and enjoy themselves as long as you please.

Gradually, therefore, the supper has become the more important meal. The men feel at home then, and come out better. What a hearty response that was that came from them when Mr. M—— urged upon them the propriety of not murmuring when any sick member pressed heavily upon the funds, and bade them thankfully remember that it was for this very purpose that the club was established!

How well, too, they answered to the points as they were put in proposing the toast of the "Working man's wife!" Two or three of the wives of members were peeping in behind the curtain. We were not supposed to see them. They were supposed to be absent, like the ladies behind the lattice-work in the House of Commons when ministers' wives anxiously or proudly come to see and hear their husbands. I should like to see the day come when the wives sit down with us. But "festina lente" is our motto. We do not see our way to it yet.

We are very thankful for the way we have already made. We see a spirit awakened amongst us, and evidently still growing, which only wants care and attention to make us a powerful club, influencing and benefiting the members in other ways besides the mere payment of a sick allowance.

And now, has some intensely businesslike reader been scarcely able to bear with me patiently thus far, because he has been all the while on the look out for sagacious remarks about the tables on which our rates of payment are calculated, and is he prepared to prove to me the exact year in which we shall probably break down upon our present system of receipts and payments?

Well; I have thought over all that again and again. But on one principle I began, and on that one principle I intend to go on. It is the men's own club. It is their own money which they collect and distribute, and they shall make their own rules and alterations.

One thing, however, I will tell my friendly reader in confidence; and that is, that the leading members of the club are being quietly indoctrinated by books and other means into sound principles of management, and that the younger members hear it reiterated again and again that they have not only a right to inquire, but are greatly to blame if they do not inquire, whether the club is such that it can honestly hope to fulfil the promises which it holds out. So that in time the inquiry must come; and when it comes it will be from the right quarter—from those who have the claim to make it and who will not rest satisfied until it is answered.

Meanwhile "our club" is "getting holt."

No. V.

ALLOTMENT RENT-NIGHT.

TWICE a year we meet in the School-room on what we call Allotment Rent-Night.

Just as he comes from his day's work, each occupier of an allotment opens the door, walks in with his money in his pocket, and takes his seat on one of the benches set ready for his accommodation. If he begins chatting with his neighbour, it is nearly sure to be on some point connected with the business of the evening; but for the most part he lolls in some easy position, waiting his turn until his name is called over, when he steps up to the table to pay his money. Should he be very tired, or have no further interest in the evening's proceedings, he then, with a short, comprehensive "good night," addressed to no one in particular, takes his departure.

But it so happens, from the nature of the tenure of our allotments, that business usually arises in which the holders have not only an interest, but to some extent a voice. Speaking about matters in which they are interested, and which they well understand, and

with scarcely any person present but themselves, they speak their minds freely, and with much shrewdness and force. Their illustrations and manner of expressing themselves are often very graphic.

"Why, look ye here, sir," said a usually silent tenant last allotment rent-night, springing suddenly from the short bench on which he was sitting alone, putting it before him in a slanting direction, and holding it up so with his left hand; "Look ye here, sir! will water run so?"—and he passed his right hand from the lower end of the form towards the higher—"Never, sir; never did, nor never will: but," said he, as he drew his right hand rapidly down the form, "it will run so, always." And before you knew what he was about, the form was back in its place, and the orator seated on it as silent as before. The words and actions were conclusive. The next speaker simply proposed that two men, whom he named, of good practical knowledge, and likely to speak their minds fearlessly, should view the ground and report upon the subject, and the matter was settled.

I said that business matters arise amongst ourselves from the nature of the tenure of our allotments. I presume that in most places where there are allotments, some proprietor interested in the well-being of the poor, and sometimes seeing that such an investment of his capital is profitable to himself, lets ground for the purpose divided into plots of suitable size; and then it becomes a simple matter between landlord and tenant. Like every other landlord he makes his own conditions, which his tenants accept when they take the allotments.

And I do not know how a landholder could well confer a greater boon upon the labouring class. Independently of the useful and profitable employment which it affords on summer evenings, and the occupation for a man when he is out of work, independently also of the indefinable sort of feeling which it seems to give him of "a stake in the land," it is certain that whatever quickens and calls into active exercise the faculties of the labourer in his own calling, must make him also a more valuable workman for his master.

It is not however my present purpose to prove the value of the allotment system, which needs no arguments of mine on its behalf, but only to give a very short sketch of the working of our own. Years ago, I know not how many, the poor of our village, as well as those of a part of the neighbouring town, had a joint claim of "right of common" over about fourteen acres of waste land. In process of time the common was enclosed, the rent of course (whoever might occupy it) belonging to the two parties of poor named above. But as the greater part of the ground in question lay very handy to our village, it was divided into small allotments, fifty-one in number, and let to the poor of the village. By this plan our people receive plainly a double benefit. Many of them obtain allotments (always a chief object of desire to the agricultural labourer) at a fair rent, and then, as part proprietors, *all* the poor of the place share the rent, which is distributed in coal during the winter season. But I doubt not that if any one holder of land were asked which he would prefer, his little bit of allotment, for

which he pays a fair, and sometimes he says a high rate, or his share of the rent which comes to him free, he would unhesitatingly choose the ground for which he pays.

From the nature however of this tenure, the tenants being in a measure almost their own landlords, they naturally view their position as somewhat different from that of mere holders of ground subject to a landlord's good feeling, or interest, or caprice; and this gives them a freedom of speech and sturdiness of feeling about the whole business, which brings the men out in their natural characters when they meet together on allotment rent-night. The rents are collected twice in the year, at 8 o'clock on the first Monday in July, and at 7 o'clock on the first Monday in November, and all business is transacted only on these occasions, and openly. The names of applicants for land are then received and set down on a list, ready to take their turn as vacancies occur, suggestions are received, disputes adjudicated upon, and rules, when necessary, revised or added. To transact all our business thus publicly is one of the leading principles upon which we act; and it is to this plan and to the strictness of our rules, together with their being *rigorously enforced*, that I attribute the fact that to manage this small farm as it were, distributed between fifty-three tenants, has occasioned not so much trouble as is sometimes given by one. I am glad to be able to bear this testimony, because it has fallen in my way to talk occasionally with owners of land, who are not indisposed to benefit the poor by setting apart a portion of it for allotments, provided it

could be done without injury to their property, and without trouble or risk in collecting the rents.

On this principle only the allotment system should be based. It should be made strictly a matter of business. I cannot express too strongly my own feeling in favour of making this the basis of every institution in which the benefit of the working classes is sought. If you wish to take the vigour, the energy, and the self-respect out of a man, to take out of him all that spring which makes him a living man co-operating with you, instead of a dead weight upheld by you, and falling back whenever your supporting hand is withdrawn, let all that you do for him be as much as possible in the way of gifts; but if you wish really to elevate him, whilst you give to him in sickness, trouble, or exceptional cases, let your regular dealings with him be, as much as you can make them so, in the way of business. In this matter of allotments, what the labouring man wants is to get his bit of ground, and for this he will generally pay more in proportion than a larger holder and will thank you then.

Then as to the risk of losing the rent. The second of our payments is taken after the crops are off. By this method of collecting our rents an opportunity is given to a dishonest tenant, leaving the place or otherwise, of evading one half-year's rent. I have looked over the books, and I find that in eleven years—the united rents of which would be 246*l.* 1*s.* 7*d.*—there have been defaulters only to the amount of 1*l.* 2*s.* 6*d.* I have been perfectly surprised at the unfailing regularity with which, at the appointed time, half-year after

half-year the full payments are made. At the same time, although I am sure that in neighbourhoods where allotments were let to the poor, in extent *a little under their requirements*, the loss from this cause would be very trifling, I should, in passing any new set of rules, adopt the plan of prepayment. I have known it in use, and it works excellently. It has also, I believe, other advantages beside that of ensuring the landlord against loss of rent, which I will not stop to point out now.

Our plan of letting the lots when they fall vacant is as follows; and I mention it, because one part of the plan appears to me rather sharp practice, although I have never heard any expression of dissatisfaction with it. "It is as fair for one as the other," they say. The names of candidates for allotments are taken only when business is being transacted on rent-night. They are placed on the list in the order in which they are received. When a lot falls it is offered to the first on the list of applicants; but if he refuse the lot he is not at liberty, like the fellow of a college refusing an ineligible living, to retain his position on the list and have first choice offered continually until he has accepted, but his name is put down at the bottom of the list. As the lots vary in size and value this often occurs, and the applicant becomes contentedly the last candidate again. "It is as fair for one as the other" is quite enough, together with the freedom of discussion allowed on all such points, to reconcile them to sharper rules than this. The last plot that fell vacant on last rent-night was an undesirable one, on account of the bad state into which the ground had been suffered to get. This is a very rare cause of complaint; so

rare that—not wanting to multiply rules, and there being a difficulty in deciding in some cases when land may be said to be "*done so ill*" that the occupier should have it taken away from him—it has never been made the subject of a rule. But this plot was notoriously out of order. The rumour was that no one of the candidates whose name was down would venture upon it. Accordingly I was visited privately by a persevering old man, who kindly informed me that, seeing that "every one had refused it," he was ready to take it if I would let it to him. Nothing will convince this good-natured friend of mine that we mean to abide by our rule of "all business transactions being above-board and public." As often as the opportunity occurs for a little private bid, always prefacing it with a statement of his willingness to "accept what nobody else will take," so often does the old gentleman appear with the same extremely good-natured face, and the same extreme slowness of comprehension as to our rule. In every such case two or three private interviews are necessary to assure my friend that private interviews on the subject are not allowed. When this lot was offered to the first two candidates in turn, each waited a few minutes over it, and then shook his head with some disparaging expression about the land. It was offered next to a young, hale, powerful-looking fellow, barely twenty years of age. There was a short merry burst of satisfaction when his name was called out, as though we had at last got "the right man in the right place," and one voice exclaimed, "Have it, Joe, by all means. You're just the man for it—plenty of strength

and time before you to get it round. Don't be afraid of it." "I'll have it," says Joe, taking one step forward, with a look of determination. There was a sort of murmur of applause, and all chance was over for my persevering old friend. But I shall have him again, the next little opening that there is for any private business, as good-humoured as ever, and as willing as ever to sacrifice himself for the public good, by taking "what nobody else will."

There is another rule which we enforce strictly which always appeared to me very sharp. I found it in use when I entered upon the management of the allotments. It is to this effect, that "if the money be not paid before the expiration of the evening appointed the land is forfeited." As no notice is given of the times of payment, which are not even fixed on recognised quarter-days, and as no provision is made for forgetfulness, this law appeared to me, when I first had to administer it, very severe. The result, however, justifies the discretion of those who framed it; for in no single instance have I known of a case where the land has been forfeited, as I should have thought likely, from forgetfulness, nor have I ever heard it commented upon as pressing hardly. But let there be any appearance even of partiality, and the case is altered immediately. A somewhat amusing example of this took place, showing the strong desire for uniform justice amongst the men, and their determination to have it, even when the exercise of it brought no possible advantage. Beyond the allotment ground, which I have said is divided into fifty-one plots, and of which every

plot is in the occupation of our own poor, are two separate and larger portions, also belonging like the allotments to our poor, but so much nearer to another village that they were let off separately years ago to two inhabitants of that village, because, on account of the distance, none of our own people were willing to have them. These tenants had for years made their payments with regularity, but not on the same nights with our men, nor with the same penalty attached to missing any exact time. Attention having been called to this fact, it was imperatively demanded by the holders of our allotments that they should be made to conform; and a rule was entered on the books to that effect. As no benefit could arise to our men from so strictly enforcing this rule, I suppose their doing so gave them the same sort of satisfaction which I once heard a lady on the sea-coast describe as felt by people in misfortune from the assurance of having fellow-sufferers to share it with them. A ship had been wrecked on the fatal sands opposite the town, with the loss of all hands. "It may have been," said the lady, "some comfort to them all to go down together."

It is well, I think, sometimes to feel that one has gathered one particular lesson from one particular source. The lesson which I have been constantly taught in the management of this allotment rent business is this: that men will bear the *strictest* rules, not only willingly, but cheerfully, if they know they are administered with perfect impartiality.

VI.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

VERY much we wished, in our little village, that Monday, July 23rd, might be a fine day.

There was to be a cricket match.

A cricketing spirit having sprung up this season amongst our young men and boys, they had mustered up courage to challenge the small town of W——, about seven miles off. The W—— eleven were coming on the 23rd, to play the return match.

As this match was to be played at home, it excited considerable interest.

Even on the Saturday evening any stranger who might have strayed into the field in which the match was to be played could not have failed to perceive that some important event was coming off. Many busy persons, and some not busy, were there. The captain of the eleven was there, looking on in his quiet way, and seeing that things were all right. Our umpire was there too, an ex-serjeant, with military step, following the roller as if he were on parade. He it was who selected the ground, and properly took credit for the

"engineering" part of the business, as he called it. William, the parish clerk, was there, mowing the ground about the wickets as closely as his scythe would cut. Small boys of course were there in abundance, getting in the way in their anxiety to be of use, and doubtless speculating on the possibility (as the highest honour to which their young minds could look forward) of some day actually playing in such a match themselves. Eleven Dukes of Wellington would not have seemed greater men in their estimation than the eleven heroes who were to fight this battle for the honour of G—— on Monday the 23rd of July.

And what tended to increase our interest and anxiety was that we had lost laurels to regain. We had been dreadfully beaten at W——. Our eleven, having had to play against a style of bowling which was altogether new to them, had been all put out in the first innings for thirteen runs. "Why," says one, "you never saw such bowling in your life. He chucked the ball" (*he* is one Emmanuel R——, a deep old file, with a head that has been on his shoulders sixty-three years) "twenty feet high at least, and it went twirling up in the air, and came down nearly straight."

Of course this trick would only do once. Of course next time this bowling was to be severely punished. It made us laugh to think how it would be knocked about now that we knew all about it. "The fact is," said one of our eleven, "we were afraid to go out. But I'll tell you what I intend to do next Monday. I shall walk right out at them with an upright bat. They're nothing when you are used to them."

Then fortunately some individual deeply read in cricket lore recalled a case, some two or three years ago, where the All England men were put out by a country twenty-two in Woburn park for only eleven runs, leaving us clearly by a simple process of arithmetic the better eleven by two runs.

So there was loud talk about our not being caught by this sort of thing a second time.

And were we not this time to have the powerful assistance of Dan Jennings? Dan, as he is familiarly called round about these parts, an inhabitant of our parish though not of our village, is a cricketer of most formidable character. A sharp eye and a quick wrist must he have, and an awkward customer at the wicket altogether must he be, who can hit harder and better to square leg than Dan. Only a day or two previously he had gone over to W—— with another eleven and scored in the second innings ninety-one off his own bat, carrying it out with him. "And then," says some member of our committee, "Dan is as good a point as ever I see." Dan had been asked to play and had consented; and the announcement was received with loud applause. It was supposed however that he might be objected to. The ninety-one was too fresh in the memory of the W—— eleven. Old Emmanuel's tosses and lobs had been fine sport for Dan when once he had got sight of the ball. So we expected that they might raise an objection. But then were there not two or three men in the W—— eleven who came from further off than Dan lived from us? So who could fairly object to Dan? Yes—It was settled that Dan must

and should be allowed to play. And were there not rumours flying about of a greater man even than Dan being brought against us, who had once made 160 off his own bat, and who had had tempting offers to leave his own calling and devote himself to cricket as a profession? Every right-minded person therefore will see the necessity of our availing ourselves of Dan's valuable help.

There the matter stood on Saturday night.

Monday morning came; but when we saw how steadily the rain kept falling all the morning, and what a drenching day it promised to be, we were troubled with grave doubts and misgivings whether the W—— eleven would come at all. At about eleven o'clock, however, there were signs of forces gathering for the battle. Tom Redman, whose services had been obtained for our side at the last moment, had been seen trotting up the village on "a grey cob, a good thick cob, stepping well." His play was unknown to most of us; but, as he belonged to a club of high repute in these parts, he was considered an acquisition. Next it was reported that eight out of the W—— eleven had arrived in two carts, and were lunching after their ride. This still left three and the umpire to be accounted for; but no doubt "Tom H—— would drive them over in his pony cart;" and as Tom was one of the players, this would complete the number. Tom is celebrated for driving a capital pony; and, if the truth were known, I should not much wonder if Tom had made a little affectation of starting late—found a little business at the last moment to detain him—seeing that he could

step so quickly over the distance. When Tom and his friends were come, the two elevens were ready.

Never were two elevens in the world more bent on playing. But cricket cannot be played with a pond under foot and another overhead; and so nothing remained for us to do but huddle together under two convenient hovels and wait with hopeless patience.

It was a thorough disappointment.

I own frankly to being as much disappointed as anybody. I had laid out for myself Monday, the 23rd of July, as an enjoyable day. I had intended to amuse *myself* by seeing the young people and others of my flock happy in amusing *themselves;* and so, under the friendly shelter of a borrowed umbrella, I marched off to my study, pondering upon the practical lesson which my parishioners were receiving upon the inevitable character of the disappointments of life.

We may smile at some trivial sorrow, which to us appears ludicrously light; and yet it may be pressing on the sufferer's heart with a crushing weight. "Yes, sir!" said a good and serious poor man once to me assentingly, winding up some remarks of mine (when I had been speaking of some of the sharpest trials human nature can bear) with what he thought a climax—"Yes, sir! this is indeed a world of trouble! My pig is ill!" I had hard work to keep from laughing at the sudden illustration. But in reality there was nothing to laugh at. The loss would have been more to him than half a million to Rothschild.

And so without a question the disappointment was great to the simple folk of the village of G——. They

don't have a cricket match every day; no, nor even once a year.

But how to make the best of it? As for playing, I had made up my mind that it was quite out of the question, when presently a member of my family, who had looked into the field from an upper window, informed me that the cricketers were all out and beginning to play.

I was soon in the field.

I had only to walk across my own garden to it. As I entered it, the first glance convinced me that something was wrong.

Both elevens, and all the spectators, who having laid by work for the day had no intention of returning to it under any circumstances, were in the centre of the field, but divided into small knots. In the centre of each knot was generally to be seen at least one energetic individual who (if attention to "the three first requisites for eloquence, Action! Action! Action!" could constitute an orator) seemed a very Demosthenes.

I guessed directly what was the matter. They were all in the midst of a great row about Dan.

I hate a row! And the last thing I have any intention of doing now is to record the particulars of a broil. Whether it take place amongst rich men or poor men, rustic or polished, clergymen or laymen, I find in every row, more or less strongly marked, only the same repulsive family features — the same offensive selfishness — the same unreasonable adherence to a side or party, blindly regardless of the right — the same inconsiderateness of the just claims and feelings of others

— the same undignified loss of self-control and true self-respect — the same disfiguring looks of anger — and the same reckless scattering, like firebrands, of bitter and irrevocable words.

Whenever a man approaches the confines of a row, there are, as the late Sir Robert Peel used to say, "three courses open" to him. Either he may step in at once, trusting that his tongue is longer, his voice louder, and his fist harder, than the tongue, voice, and fist of any of the parties already involved; or he may put his hands in his pockets, looking calmly on as an observer of phenomena or walking off in another direction; or he may endeavour to recal the disputants to the consideration of first principles. I for one confess myself wholly unequal to the first course. The last is clearly the best when it is practicable; but it undoubtedly requires a material to work upon which is not always to be found among the component elements of a row.

Such an element however, in the present case, was happily to be met with in the host of "The Bell" from W——, who has my cordial acknowledgment of the quiet reasonableness with which he received the few remarks which I ventured to take the liberty of making. He realised, I believe, something of the great truth which should be carried out into recreation, as well as into work and into the loftiest scenes of human action, that he who conquers himself is the victor, and that he gains who for others' sakes has learnt to yield.

The W—— eleven were called together, and drawn a little on one side. A short consultation took place;

and it was announced at the close of it that the objection was withdrawn, and Dan was permitted to play.

But—our disappointment!

Settling about Dan by no means settled the weather. It rained as hard as ever; and there was nothing for it but to retreat to the school-room where our dinner was laid. Several small but successful jokes were perpetrated on the subject of our all getting an innings here—and a good one too. So before long, myself at one end of the table, and mine host of "The Bell" at the other, we were comfortably seated where we were independent of the elements.

As soon as dinner was over and the cloth cleared, the table was spread with chess and draughts boards, dominoes, and shepherd's chess (merry pegs as the boys call it here); and so absorbed did we all become with our various battles, that as our scorer said you "might have heard a pin drop."

A very pleasant afternoon and a very rational one did we all spend together. It was almost as good as the cricket match, except that that was what we had all prepared for. And on a bright sunny day, after men have been steadily and hard at work, and earned the right to a holiday, what can beat the healthy English game, at which when we were young we spent not the least happy or most unprofitable of our hours, and at which we still like to stand and see our little bits of boys aping their seniors and talking about shooters and bailers, bowling round, and playing forward, hitting to leg or cutting to off, in the familiar phraseology of our boyhood? It sends memory back to the old school

again and the old playmates, and when she returns from her musing we are none the worse, if the right stuff is in us, for the brief dream; we have all the more kindly sympathy for the young ones growing up round about us, and we ourselves turn with fresh vigour to the sterner work for which we have recognised the Great Creator sent us into life. Only don't attempt to force the change of feeling on with unnatural haste, or you may do mischief! Leave the work of life and growth of character to do it. Cricket playing will then be dropped as the necessity arises, leaving behind a hearty sympathy with those who have youth and health and leisure and spirits to enjoy it.

Only a day or two ago, I heard that friend of the working classes, and able advocate of their interests, the Rev. J. B. Owen, speaking in a large and happy gathering, met together in the town neighbouring to our village to enjoy their annual holiday. The occasion drew from him remarks in the spirit of which many earnest hearts are concurring in town and village in this land. I was glad to take down from his lips the exact words of one or two of his many valuable sentences. "A meeting like that," he said, "marked the greatly improved state of the amusements of the people." "I believe," he added, "that ministers of religion should take more pains to identify themselves with the recreations and amusements of their people than it seems to be the conviction of some of us that we ought to do."

Sound words and just!

But I am not writing a paper on the people's amuse-

ments and the clergyman's place in reference to them. I am talking about our "disappointment."

We had almost forgotten that it was one. We had well nigh forgotten the cricket match altogether.

There was John B——, who was to have gone in first on our side because he is a "sticker," tackling that neat little batsman, Mr. T——, from W——, at a game of chess in the middle of the long table, just as if Mr. T—— had come over for no other purpose in the world. And John upheld the honour of G——. We only taught him chess last winter at our night club, or "Free and Easy," as we sometimes call it; and John was the victor.

Then there sat at the table next to the chess players Emmanuel, the "boy," as I heard him call himself at dinner, playing draughts with another "boy," of his own side, younger than himself, and not much over 55.

Then mine host of "The Bell" and myself just managed to have one game of draughts, in which he fairly beat me; and we were talking of having another when the door opened, and a cheery little voice, which we know in the village very well, cried out, "It's left off raining, and some of them are stripped out, and began to play."

"Ring the school-bell, and put the things all away!" And pell-mell away go the victors and vanquished once more for the cricket field.

"Your first innings!" cried mine host; "suppose you put the young 'uns in, and give them an innings at any rate. Don't put your best men in first! It's too late to play a match. Let's have a friendly game."

It *was* too late. (5.30.) But a little game of one innings was played out, in which the great Dan was put out for three runs; and, with all the champion's aid, we came a little behind on the score.

As for myself, after all my expectation and intention of having an idle day to enjoy the match, I neither saw an over bowled, nor a ball struck; but as I passed by the end of the field, to fulfil other and more important engagements, I saw men, women, and children, intently looking on, and heard shouts of encouragement as full of mirth and gladness as if no drop of rain had fallen.

What had become of the Disappointment? It was all forgotten. It had rolled away with that heavy bank of clouds which hung with a retreating frown in the north-east.

Above, below, all was sunshine. Still I hope that the W—— eleven will visit us again on some finer day, when we can play a match right through, and I hope that we shall beat them without the assistance of Dan.

If we do not, though they are stronger than we are, still, as we shall fight, like Englishmen and cricketers, for the victory, Defeat, we own, will be Disappointment.

VII.

THE SCHOOL TREAT.

ONE village school treat is very much like another. Ours does not present any material points of difference from a thousand similar ones in country parishes. Perhaps for that very reason its simple incidents may not be without interest to the reader who cares at all for the scenes of rustic life.

The children were to have their tea in the field next the parsonage at five o'clock. And with what eagerness village children look forward to their annual and almost only treat, none but those who fare hard all the year round, and have but one holiday, can rightly say.

A rough set of tables had been prepared — deal planks resting on curiously-shaped pieces of wood, something like a boomerang, only much thicker and less curved, piled one upon the other, until they reached the requisite height. I did not know what they were till this year, when I found that they were the rough material for the fellies of cart wheels.

Plenty of active hands were at work all the morning, — chief officers, cutting up cake and bread and butter, arranging flowers, setting the tables on the lawn for the *aristocracy* of the parish, — subalterns, passing to and fro between the scene of action and many neighbours' houses, that furnished teapots, tea services, kettles, and other useful articles.

The tea services were not for the children. Our custom is to let them bring their own cups and saucers or mugs; and at a very early hour they might be seen standing in little knots with the tea apparatus carefully tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, indulging, as they watched the progress of the preparations, in all the pleasures of hope.

As the afternoon drew on, our bigger boys came straggling home one by one, having a half-day's holiday, kindly given to them by their considerate masters.

About four o'clock our neighbours, without whose cheerful company our treat would be a dull affair, came dropping in.

There comes one down the lane on his stubby little pony, with his two little girls and their brother walking at his side. He could ill spare the time this busy day; "But," said he, looking good-naturedly at the little ones, "I couldn't help giving them the treat."

So little by little we gather our forces. We collect the children at the school-room, between which and the field where the tea takes place lies the church, all three scarce a stone's throw apart. It is easy therefore to turn aside, on our way to the field, and begin our holiday in the best way with a short service. It occu-

pied just half-an-hour. The sermon was exactly eight minutes long; and long enough for the occasion. "There is time for all things;" and so I suppose there is a time for long sermons. Be that as it may, I am sure the time for them is not before the school children's treat. So we are very soon in the field; and now, from 190 children, arises the little grace, "Be present at our table, Lord," so often sung on similar occasions.

One hundred and ninety out of a population of six hundred seems a large number. But all persons conversant with these matters will at once know that the number present at a tea does not represent the number present at other times. There is no muster-roll so efficient for school children as a tea-drinking. No excuses to-day. No complaints of "no shoes," "couldn't get ready," "had to go on an *arrant*," or "gone to see an uncle or aunt." I don't think there was a child missing, except that poor little boy who was seen standing in the field, when the children's tea was over, with the backs of both his hands up to his large eyes, the picture of hopeless grief. He had been kept at work, and arrived too late. If he never had a trouble before, he had one on the 10th of August, 1860. And he will do well if he never have a comforter at his side less brave and kind than that little quiet sister Lucy, who sought us out and brought us to his help. Woman-like, she conquered her natural timidity, and asked for her brother what she could have gone without fifty teas before she could have mustered courage to ask for herself.

Look at that group of mothers round the gate,

thick as bees, and that other group at the opposite corner, next the village! They are there, chiefly and ostensibly, to take the cups and saucers and mugs which the children brought from their homes, that the latter might be set free for their games at once. But watch their faces, and the intent look with which they eye the scene.

But they are making way for some one; and by the arm in the sling I see it is an old school-boy who likes the old place, and has always an extra smile on his good-humoured face when he pays us a visit. He has cut his hand very severely, and manages to produce a frightful effect on lively imaginations by choosing a handkerchief with a great deal of deep red colour in it, the red part of which he has disposed just where the wounded hand rests.

Several knots of people assemble about the tables. Here is one little knot, with a few pleasant neighbours in the middle, Englishman-like, discussing the weather.

"There always are plenty of croakers," says one in reply to some remark depreciatory of the weather.

"But we have only had three hours' summer at all," says another, who seems to represent the gloomy side of matters; "they say we shall have provisions up to I don't know what; it will be very bad for those who only just contrive to live as it is."

"A very odd season, certainly," says a third.

"Unaccountable," exclaims a fourth.

Unaccountable is a very favourite word in these parts, and often had recourse to by us when we are in a difficulty about expressing our feelings.

"Ah! well," replies the first speaker, "they talk of a bad harvest, but I am not afraid; there are some bad crops on the clay, and so of course that gives an excuse for crying out — but there is no harm done yet."

Thank you, friend, for the cheering word! Give it, speak it, where you can! It inspirits us and sends us on with lighter heart and firmer step.

I am sorry I am not agriculturist enough to do justice to the sound remarks made, in the next knot, on the subject of the new mowing machine.

I contrasted in my mind, as I listened, the spirit in which its introduction was being discussed, and with which I know it is generally regarded in the neighbourhood, with the manner in which such improvements were regarded when I was a boy, and when I well remember the serious riots about the then new threshing machines. I listened with great pleasure to an account of the construction of this new instrument, and the effective manner in which it does its work, mowing the grass fields, "ridge and furrow" as they are about us, "like a gentleman's lawn;" but above all, to a very able statement of the way in which it causes increased work, by compelling a higher state of cultivation and superior style of farming, thus making more work for the labourer, though in a different manner, instead of taking the bread, as the ignorant suppose, out of the poor man's mouth. What an advantage it is in any neighbourhood to have even one man with a large and liberal mind, power to see beyond the immediate interests of the hour, high character, and fair powers of expression! Such men are the

pioneers that clear away old and deep-rooted prejudices, and plant the seeds of new and better ways for the coming generation. They often suffer for it themselves; but the best of them are prepared for that.

But, by the noise, and, I fear I must add, the scuffling at the head of the left-hand table, it is evident that the boys have done tea, and the sooner they are dismissed the better.

"Isn't it odd," remarks the lady presiding at this table, "that boys never can see that they are having any fun unless they are hurting one another?"

"There is much to be said," I replied, "on behalf of this peculiarity of boy nature."

"Look at Charley," said my friend, breaking off into another subject; "isn't he in his element to-day?"

The lady certainly did not mean that noise and scuffling are Charley's element. Charley is, in his way, an authority in the village. Young and old, rich and poor, all who live amongst us, or come amongst us, know, respect, and are friends with Charley. From his birth a cripple, were you to judge by the outside alone, you would with perfect justice think him an object of unmixed pity. But spare your pity and compassion, for there is nothing here to deplore. I have never seen a happier person. I have seen him sick and ill; I have visited him when he thought, and we all thought too, that he was dying — and I see him always as poor (in outward things) as human being well can be — but I have never seen him otherwise than the picture of content; and I have seen him, especially in the near expectation of death, radiant with happiness.

He has never been more than two miles from his native village; but his simplicity is no hindrance to his usefulness with his infant class on Sundays. His class consists of very young ones, from six to seven years of age; but he arrests and keeps up their attention. He pictures out a scene (as far as the circumstances come within the reach of his powers of illustration), throwing in touch after touch of natural pathos, till twenty-five pair of sparkling eyes, riveted on the helpless cripple, prove the existence of a gift which no education could bestow. Charley has his "one talent," and well he uses it. The little ones look up to him and love him. On a fine day in the week he may be seen in the village, seated on a low log, or leaning with the help of his crutches against a stile, and always with some of the little ones clustered about him.

And now for the tea on the lawn, the second part of the entertainment. The children were to amuse themselves in the field, while the tea-makers and the elders of the party take their refreshment, preparatory to the general sports.

Grace had just been sung, when I felt *one drop of rain!* Ominous drop! One glance upwards is enough. The appearance of the sky told at once that we were in for a wet night.

And so — there was an end of our enjoyment? No, that I am sure there was not. Given the light and merry hearts of children, with kindly friends about them, and heavy must be the clouds above, and thick the showers below, that can spoil their mirth.

Thankful for the dry time, during which the children

had taken their tea in comfort, the rest of us, under mackintoshes, cloaks, and umbrellas, such as could be hastily got together, took our own in high good humour. What is it that imparts so often an additional zest to enjoyment, when outward circumstances prove unfavourable? Is it that the inward spirit and energy are called into more vigorous action, or that a little discomfiture in our plans acts like the lemon in punch, and gives a pleasant acidity to a mixture which would without it cloy from oversweetness? Whatever be the reason, the fact is indisputable. "Ah," says one of a pair of middle-aged neighbours comfortably seated over their tea under the pink may-tree, with an old rustic table before them; "it is by no means an easy thing to make people uncomfortable who have made up their minds not to be so." "So it seems," I think to myself, turning round and catching sight of two young faces at the long table under an umbrella, one tip of which is dipped in a cream; two faces as merry as ever shone on the pleasantest May-day. Happy seventeen! I wonder what amount of wet would damp the brightness out of those sunny faces.

Then, while I am asking questions, there is another I should like to ask, and that is, "How is it that people catch cold so much less when they are thoroughly happy?" I was greatly afraid of the effects of this tea in the rain. We had sat down before it set fairly in, and thought we might as well sit it through. But though sixty people, some of whom were delicate, sat through it, not one (and I made anxious inquiries) caught cold. I have my own explanation of the fact.

The reader, no doubt, both guesses what it is, and agrees with it.

I need hardly say, however, that we spent no more time at the tea-table than was absolutely necessary. And I recommend as a remedy against the idle habit of dawdling over one's meals, the taking them on a lawn during the descent of a steady shower.

We were soon up. — And now what was to be done with that basket of prizes which a liberal friend had brought for distribution amongst the children who should be winners at the several games? It contained a variety of articles, as varied and almost as numerous as the Wizard of the North can produce from his inexhaustible sleeve; whistles, money-boxes, plates, hymn-books, dolls, hammers, balls, marbles, mugs, thimbles, needle-cases, something to please the boys, something to charm the girls, something attractive for the lover of finery, something solid and substantial for the thrifty and sober-minded, something, in fact, for every taste and every body.

Racing, &c., for them out in the field is out of the question to-night; so we are soon safely housed in the school-room — thankful for such an excellent room in the wet — ready for fun, and bent upon being pleased. And pleased we were.

Pitilessly, steadily, the rain pelted down; but what cared we? Johnny Gilpin rode his "good friend the calender's horse" for the 50,000th time since first he took his ride to the endless delight of the British public, and we all laughed at his misfortunes as heartily as if we had never heard of him before.

Pitilessly, steadily, down came the rain: but what cared we? for we had some exceedingly interesting jumping matches, in which the excited candidates stripped off their jackets in proof of their determination not to be beaten; and how we roared in derision at the clumsy fellows who jumped with their legs a yard apart, one leg coming down on one side of the stick, and one on the other; and how we applauded, in addition to the honourable gifts which they received, the successful athletes.

Down came the rain, harder than ever; but there was hopping forwards, hopping backwards, hopping blindfold, and in the midst of all, special constables holding the surging juvenile populace in some kind of check, while a calm judge presided in severe dignity at the table where the prizes lay, with Charley seated at his side. We were all very thankful for the fine hour to begin with; but what with jumping, and hopping, and reading, and singing, and good humour and fun, what cared we for the rain?

Soberly and steadily we closed soon after eight, and went quietly home.

The rain had not spoilt our treat. As my friend said under the pink may-tree, "It is not so easy a matter to make people uncomfortable who have made up their minds not to be so."

VIII.

THE PENNY BANK.

A USEFUL institution in a country village is the Penny Bank.

Its quiet working does more to foster economy and management, with their attendant benefits, amongst the working classes, than all the good advice upon the subject that could be given.

Our experience in the matter is but small — very limited as to numbers — and extended as yet over only a short space of time. Our Bank has been established little more than two years; but some idea may be formed from its statistics of the good which it must do.

The population is under 600, and yet out of that number we have more than a hundred names on our books, and the sum which has been deposited during the two years is upwards of 80*l.*, of which 35*l.* still remains, and is funded in the neighbouring Savings Bank.

What would have become of the larger portion of this money, had not the convenient Penny Bank been at

hand to receive it? How much of that sum of 35*l.* now standing to the credit of various names in our ledger, would, I wonder, have burnt the proverbial hole in the pocket, or been abstracted in a moment of temptation or pressure from the well-known stocking in the cupboard?

Nor is this all. The least part of the benefit arising from such institutions is the material assistance which they render. This may be the only benefit anticipated by those who use them; but of far more importance are the qualities they cultivate and the habits they assist in forming.

It is our custom to publish a report at the end of each half year, a copy of which is sent to every house in the village, and we may judge how very many little acts of self-denial must have been practised, from the fact that the sum of 14*l.* 4*s.* was entered during the first six months in not less than 886 separate deposits. How many a penny must have found its way into the Bank which would otherwise have been spent unprofitably! How many little lessons of economy must have been learnt in the most effective way!

But if these many separate deposits form, as it were, landmarks, which enable us to track the usefulness of the institution in the past, who shall track its influence for the future over the homes of men who have learnt from childhood by its means to know the self-respect and taste the enjoyment of being saving and prudent? It is not possible to estimate the happy results that must spring from that quiet hour on Saturday evenings, when upon a chair and a three-legged stool, two willing

workers are seated at a little table in a corner of the school-room conducting our Bank business, and the children come dropping in one by one, with their books in their hands, and a prudent senior now and then amongst them.

The cause of Penny Banks has been advocated by others with more ability and a much wider experience than I can bring. The best information upon the subject may be found in No. 2 of the Rev. J. Erskine Clarke's excellent "Papers on the Social Economy of the People."* Each one, however, may add his little testimony to the common stock; and in doing so, I need not write only in faith, and imagine the good that may arise in the future. Many a little story, small in itself, might be told, which shows how the Penny Bank seems almost to act the part of a kind friend, who has been watching for the critical moment in which he could come forward and give unexpectedly the most welcome help.

"It seems like a gift, sir," one or two have said to me, who have found a little sum come in most seasonably, which, but for the Bank, they never would have had at hand to help them.

So it must have seemed to John M——, upon whom club-night came, as a time of inevitable payment comes upon too many, to find him unprepared. John is a member of "our Club," one rule of which is, that one quarter's payment may be left unpaid, but that if a second quarter-night should pass without the accounts being squared by the time the books are closed, the

* Published by Bell and Daldy.

name of the defaulter shall be struck off, rendering him subject, before he can re-enter, to a payment of the neglected sums, a fresh examination for a medical certificate as to health, another entrance fee, and some months' probation before he can claim the benefits of the club in case of his falling sick. Poor John! What was he to do? In vain did he run in all directions to find a friend, combining in his person these two requisites, viz., the possession of a spare six shillings and sixpence, and good nature enough in his composition to lend it to John. But in a fit of unwonted providence he had, some considerable time before, put a few pence occasionally into the bank, how much he knew not. Off flies John, as a last resource, to the secretary. The accounts are examined, and there, happy fellow, stands the sum of six shillings. The six shillings are advanced, the extra sixpence is easily borrowed, and the money paid just in time. John, then, has reason to speak a good word for the Penny Bank; it made him his own best friend in the sharp hour of need, by helping him to help himself.

So it was also with my little friend Harry B——, only that his need was not so sharp. Walking up the village one dark night between eight and nine o'clock on a winter's evening, I heard a peculiar slouching step, which I thought I recognised, and caught sight of the figure of a little boy of about fourteen years of age.

"That you, Harry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where have you been?"

"To B——, sir."

"To B—— at this time of night? Nobody ill, I hope?"

And then Harry went on to inform me that he had been to invest 3*s.* in a bran new pair of leathern gaiters, and 4½*d.* in a pair of braces. I remembered, as he detailed to me the nature and cost of his purchases, that on the previous Saturday evening he had drawn the sum of 3*s.* 6*d.* out of the Bank. I understood, therefore, the tone in which he gave the information; but any one could have told in the dark by the sound of his voice that there was something peculiarly satisfactory connected with that pair of gaiters; the fact is, they were a kind of present, a present from the Penny Bank, or rather through his good friend, the Bank, from Harry to himself.

It was by a sort of accident that I was able to connect so closely in this case the purchase and the withdrawal of the purchase-money; for I not only do not take the money or keep the books myself, but I am not much in the room while the business is being transacted. The time is not convenient for me (between seven and eight on Saturday evenings), and I am fortunate enough to have two parishioners who cheerfully undertake the work.

But whilst these two friends work the internal machinery of the Bank, there are quiet outsiders who further the good cause in their own way. There is, for instance, my old friend whose misgivings about the "Free and Easy" are recorded in the first of these papers. He is very fond of the Penny Bank. He is a sort of Penny Bank Missionary. He sticks up in his

window the half-yearly printed reports, pasting them against the panes at a convenient height, so that passers-by may be able to read them. Now and then, when he sees a stranger so engaged, he enters into conversation with him, and sends him away with a desire to have "something of the sort where he lives." Instead, therefore, in our last circulation of reports, of merely leaving one at his house, as we have heretofore done, we left a dozen or twenty with him, and I doubt not they will be well used. It is better, in the long run, to trust to the steady undercurrent of such influences than to try and get up any general excitement by way of recommending the Bank. While, therefore, we draw attention from time to time to its existence and advantages by our reports, we have gradually abstained from all measures and practices tending in any way to produce an artificial development.

One result of this is curious, and did not make itself apparent to me until I had occasion to consult the books in connection with this paper. I have referred above to the large number of deposits of which the first half year's gross receipts were composed. The report for that period happened to be lying at my side, and I copied out the numbers from it. A similar calculation had not been made in the succeeding reports. I was much surprised, therefore, in counting up the deposits for the last six months, to find that they were much fewer in number, while on the other hand, in gross amount, they were more than double those of the first six months. The inference to be drawn appears to me a satisfactory one, viz., that with many of the depositors prudent

saving is now becoming not only a fixed, but an increasing principle. They put in more. The Bank becomes more a necessity to them. It is forming in them a habit which will in most of them never be broken. On the other hand, the work not being forced, there is the usual percentage of falling off. By dispensing with the forcing apparatus, the true vitality of the work is seen.

It appears to me that not only in this matter, but in its general management, the more nearly a Penny Bank can be conducted on the principles of a bank for the higher classes, the greater its real benefit. It cannot, of course, be open for as many hours, although *we pay out money at any time;* but the more easily the working classes can use it, and the more quietly they can make their entries and drawings, the more sterling will be the character of the work which it effects.

There are certain pleasant columns in our book, where a sum has been entered with a regularity either unfailing or scarcely interrupted from the time when the first entry was made. Once form a habit of this kind, and like all habits, as a general rule, it will grow.

For many a fourth Saturday evening did one steady lad make his appearance, after his monthly wages had been received, with the sum of four shillings. We used to say, "It is George's night;" and George always came. At last we missed him, and he continued to be an absentee for some time. He has reappeared lately with a larger sum for his first deposit, and an expression of regret that he ever discontinued his payments. The

old habit seems to have power upon him, much as an anchor and cable bring up a ship. George's employment keeps him late, and he makes his appearance nearly at the end of the hour; but our proper rearguard-man is Philip.

Just upon the stroke of eight, or sometimes a minute or two after, the door opens, and Philip enters, always cheerful, and always with those three little books in his hand, and the same words as he lays them upon the table. "Fourpence each, *if* you please." Philip is a journeyman baker, working daily with little intermission from four o'clock in the morning to eight at night. "Hard work, Philip," said we one night to him. "Very hard work, sir. I am certain sure a man is best at work, but sometimes I think mine's most too hard." But one result of Philip's hard work is that he never misses at the Bank, *and Philip's children never miss at the Sunday-school.* A close connection, I imagine, there is between the columns of the bank book on Saturday night, and the columns of the Sunday-school register on the next day morning.

There is good auxiliary work, depend upon it, going on in the Penny Bank, for good habits are the best soil in which to sow good seed. For help in its management we are largely indebted to one parishioner, the honorary secretary of "our Club." When I first thought of establishing a Penny Bank, I cast about for a helper, who would steadily keep to the work when he had once undertaken it. It is the willing horse that bears the extra burden, and so I knew where to look.

"John," said I, one cold evening, about two years

ago last Michaelmas, meeting him just outside the village; "I have a project in my head."

"What is it, sir?"

"Something in which you can help me, as the clergyman, your neighbours, and, not least, yourself. I know you feel glad to be employed; and for the good of others, I want you to bind yourself to manage a Penny Bank."

John walks twenty-five miles a day (Sundays excepted) over a very rough road, and works at the trade of a shoemaker besides; and therefore, when seven o'clock on Saturday night comes, John has as fair a right as any man to claim the liberty of sitting down at his ease, and closing the week by his own fireside.

But without hesitation John accepted the work, and for two years, in conjunction with another good friend and fellow-labourer, has kept our books and given his constant attendance at the school. The fact is his heart is in it. A good night at the Penny Bank is to John something like what a successful speculation, bringing in some few tens of thousands of pounds at a haul, is to some great London or Liverpool merchant.

"I must inform you," he writes on one occasion to an absent friend, "that we get on well with the Bank. The first night of your absence we took 17*s.* 2*d.*; the second, we took 12*s.*; and the third, 21*s.*; and six new depositors in the three nights. I am very pleased to be able to send you such good news, but I think most of the depositors, with others, begin to see the benefit of it, and I hope we shall have six more by the time you return. I am so pleased that I am able to assist. I

never feel happier than when I am doing something for the Bank or Club. I often wish I had the means some have. I think my time would be always occupied."

It is occupied, and well. Seventy copies of the "British Workman" and "Band of Hope" does John by his own efforts circulate every month—a little scheme of usefulness which he originated and carries on himself. He never loses an opportunity of trying to reclaim a fellow-creature from drink and its consequences, and he is the unwearied and earnest honorary secretary of "our Club," having five years ago declined to receive any salary, and having done the work since then truly, as the saying is, "for love."

John is a useful man. We could ill spare him ourselves; but wherever there is a Penny Bank we should be glad to hear that there is a secretary to it like John.

IX.

THE BOYS' SCHOOL.

A COUNTRY clergyman has great difficulties in the way of forming and maintaining efficient schools. Except in a very small parish three separate schools, although they are seldom to be obtained, are desirable; viz., an infants' school; a boys' school, capable of imparting useful instruction to the labourers' sons for a year or two before they are sent to work, and at the same time of giving a fair commercial education to the sons of any small farmers or tradesmen in the place; and a girls' school, the proper training institution for the future wives and mothers of the village.

True that in some country parishes all these objects are attained; but these are highly favoured spots, populous enough to furnish a sufficient number of children for these separate schools, and having the good fortune to possess some wealthy resident parishioner or parishioners — liberal as well as wealthy — who supply the funds. But this is the exception, not the rule. Most country clergymen are thankful, without any re-

flection on the liberality of their people, to be able to raise, from all sources of private contributions to which they can appeal, an annual sum of 25*l.* or 30*l.* for all the educational requirements of their flock. How very many cannot raise even that! Here then are all the means at their command. What are they to do? What margin is there left, after the necessary expenses of one efficient school of any kind have been defrayed, towards providing a second?

How tantalising to hear one's friends in towns talking of balances of nearly 20*l.*, which "must be spent, because it is never well to show a balance;" or, again, of a liberal addition of 20*l.*, unasked, to the master's salary! Very glad are we in rustic spots to hear of these golden showers falling so freely in other places; but the pleasant necessity of getting rid of balances which "must be spent" seldom perplexes us, and at times the secret wish will rise in our hearts that some few stray drops would find their way on to our own little fields. But we have our advantages in other ways, and must cheerfully make the best of the means which we have.

The common result of the difficulty which I have described is, that after much consideration of the subject, and after looking at it from all points of view, the minister of such a parish settles down at last into the conviction that his wisest plan is to be content with one school, and to make that one as comprehensive and as efficient as possible; and, suiting himself to the special requirements of his locality, he concentrates upon this his funds and his energies. Those who can

sympathise with his particular difficulties will know that, in nineteen cases out of twenty, this course is the best. I speak generally. Exceptional cases admit of exceptional treatment; and therefore, in recording the success of an effort to provide for a country village increased facilities in the way of education, I should wish it to be understood that a variety of circumstances, to some of which I shall have occasion to allude as I proceed, concurred to favour me which might not assist another in making the same experiment. In fact we were almost too successful. A tree grew up in seven years from the first sapling which we planted, the future proportions of which I, as little as any one, anticipated. Had I anticipated into what an institution our school would grow, I should either have shrunk from the risk and responsibility which it could not fail to bring upon me, or have planned in earlier days to meet the growing exigencies of such an establishment as it became.

My plan, in the first instance, was merely to have a self-supporting day school. It struck me that while to obtain funds from ordinary sources for an ordinary school was in our case impossible, it would be quite possible to obtain them for a first-rate school (if it should succeed in establishing its reputation) by its becoming self-supporting, and that in this way an expensive school could be maintained with ease where there was no prospect of maintaining a cheap one. The scheme was to plant in the village a central day school for the education of the sons of tradesmen, farmers, &c., residing within a radius of about three

miles, and by the funds thus procured to furnish all necessary means of education for our own boys, down to the sons of the humblest day-labourer.

The locality favoured me greatly. The position of the village, situated near to a town containing nearly 3000 inhabitants, of which it is an outlying hamlet, first suggested the plan to my mind.

For such a school as I proposed to establish, in which there should be a mixture of classes, a village is a better position than a town. In the latter the number of boys of the poorer class would so far exceed that of the higher that it would not be easy to give sufficient attention to the few who are more advanced, while the evils feared by parents would be developed to their fullest extent. On the other hand, in a country village, the labourers' sons — those at least of them who would be at school — are few in number and very young. Naturally, therefore, they take their position in the lower class of the school. Another circumstance lessening the dislike which parents feel to the mixing of classes is that, after afternoon school, communication ceases, and boys not belonging to the village return to their homes.

A second local advantage to the scheme was the fact that there are three or four villages within a distance of from two to three miles from us; and I owe much to the generous sympathy and neighbourly kindness shown in the matter by brother clergymen. It is not to be expected that an experiment like this, the carrying out of which requires many concurrent favourable circumstances, the first indispensable requisite

being a high salary for the master, should be tried at the same time in two villages near to one another. One superior central school would therefore readily be acknowledged as a convenience, and, with its reputation established, gladly supported.

To enter into any description of the internal working of the school does not come within the scope of these sketches; but as the whole success of this experiment depended, in the first instance, upon the superiority of the school being unquestioned, no pains were spared to accomplish this and to entitle it justly to support.

The school rose so rapidly as to be self-supporting the first year; and, for the sake of the advantages it offered, not only was a larger sum paid than had previously been paid in the neighbourhood, but the inconvenience was submitted to of mixture, without partiality or distinction, with boys of the humblest grade. In this way it was that the best possible means of education were brought home to all the boys of our own village, labourers' sons being admitted at the usual penny a week. We began on the first morning that we opened with eleven boys, and I had then not the most distant expectation that, in less than seven years from that time, a school would have arisen containing eighty pupils, thirty of whom should be day scholars, according to the first intention, and the other fifty boarders, coming literally from north, south, east, and west—from Wales, Scotland, and even from China.

How this extension of the original plan came about let me explain. Two circumstances combined led to the establishment, at first on a very small scale, of a

boarding-house in connection with the day school. One was the possibility, after the first novelty of the undertaking had worn off, of the number of the day scholars decreasing. Our tide had been taken at the flood, but it did not follow that it should not have its ebbings. Progress is happily catching: one forward move has a tendency to create others. It was to be expected, therefore, and indeed to be desired, whatever might be the particular effect on our own little village, that there should arise something like an honourable spirit of emulation. But in such a case the income that maintained our school would be endangered. The other circumstance was the frequent expression of a regret by parents who lived just beyond the distance that would allow of their boys coming to and fro daily, that they could not avail themselves of the advantages which the school afforded. When some of them went so far as to inquire where and how their boys could be lodged and boarded in the village for the convenience of attending the day school, the thought suggested itself that the master of the school might reside in a small house with a few boarders, and that by this means the benefits of the school might be extended over a wider area, and the school itself be rendered independent of the fluctuations of day scholars and permanently self-supporting.

It was easy to gather a few boys round the master, and place them under his superintendence.

The object being at first merely what I have stated — viz., to secure a permanent income for the support of the day school — the terms fixed were the very

lowest consistent with liberal management, being 20*l.* 8*s.* for everything except books.

Year by year this boarding school rapidly increased, until it grew to be an establishment, involving at such terms no little risk to the responsible manager, and in its details no little anxiety and care. As it grew it assumed a different aspect. Instead of there being half a dozen or a dozen boarders only, whose school fees saved the balance at the end of the year from any danger of being on the wrong side, a school arose of nearly fifty boarders, and the anxieties connected with its management constituted a new and separate charge far more weighty than that of the day school at first contemplated.

And here I pause to pay a just and grateful tribute to the memory of one without whose aid I should not have ventured as far as I did, and of whom I can speak with unfettered gratitude, inasmuch as she "rests from her labours." The wife of one of my parishioners, the mother of a large family, a pattern of industry at home, the ceaseless visitor of well and sick, the personal friend of every poor family amongst us, she was the ready counsellor and right hand of the minister, and the ardent supporter of every scheme for the good of the souls and bodies of those around her. I do not desire to leave the impression that I am drawing a perfect character. Like most characters of unusual vigour hers had its corresponding drawbacks; but for a combination of qualities fitting her for usefulness in the sphere in which she moved, for soundness of judgment, for fertility of resource, for a hopefulness

that only seemed to gain elasticity from the pressure of difficulties, for force of character, and for what is rarely united with it, readiness to act under direction, for power and will to work, all under the rule of steady Christian principle which kept the strong will in check and the quick spirit under control, it seldom indeed falls to the lot of a minister to meet with such a fellow-labourer. It was to this invaluable parishioner that I was indebted for being saved, while she was spared to us, from a world of anxiety in the household arrangements of our school.

Briefly also let me express my appreciation of the labours of others for the school, and especially of the valuable services of the able master who conducted it during the last three years of its continuance in its larger form.

The result of its growth was that at last it reached a third stage in its progress.

The first was that simply of a self-supporting day school.

The second was that of a day school, chiefly supported by the day scholars, with a few boarders added for the purpose of providing against a fluctuation of the funds.

The third was that of a large boarding school admitting day scholars, the boarding school element having become uppermost, and the day school part an appendage to it.

Our school had now developed into a large and thriving institution. It had obtained the full confidence of the public, and might, while that confidence

continued, have been moulded into any shape in reason. I have no question but that one hundred boys might have been obtained, with fit accommodation for them, as easily as the fifty. But we had reached a point at which I did not expect to be able to continue just as we were. We had outgrown our first plans. We had not anticipated our success. The terms had been originally fixed with a view to furnish an education at prime cost; and although at these terms the school did meet its expenses, and a little more, the surplus was only just sufficient to supply a few needful improvements.

We might have continued at this point, however, for a considerable period of time, but for one of those visitations of sickness to which every school is liable, and which forced upon me prematurely the question which I wished to postpone — viz., whether to make another advance, to remodel the whole concern, raising the terms and erecting buildings suitable to the importance which it had assumed, or to retreat within the modest limits at first proposed.

On a step so serious as the first of these alternatives I was not prepared to venture. Had some fairy, as in olden tales, been kind enough to appear with one of those magic lamps which dispose so charmingly of a variety of practical difficulties, I might have done so; but without such aid I must have entered upon engagements which, on the part of a humble country clergyman, would have been neither prudent nor just. Although no fairy was at hand, there were many liberal friends and supporters who made abundant promises of assistance, even to the extent of offering to

erect the needful buildings; but I had thoroughly considered the alternatives before the crisis presented itself, and could only decline the kind offers of my friends.

The school did not therefore re-assemble in its extended form; but the experiment had been so successful that it may be well to make a remark or two, in conclusion, by way of encouragement to those who may be disposed to venture upon a similar undertaking.

My experience, then, is this: that if a clergyman, having a practical knowledge of the subject of education, and sufficient leisure (from the nature of his charge) to give attention to its management, will establish a school either at prime cost, or at such cost only as will after a short period of success secure him from pecuniary risk, if he will himself guarantee that a good sound education shall be given in it and the domestic department be attended to, and will see that this is done really well, his success will be most rapid, and, if deserved, continued.

"Why should he do this?" some may ask. There are several good reasons which would induce many a clergyman to devote himself to such a work and to throw his heart into it, if the idea were once suggested to him, and if he could see a reasonable prospect of success. It is by no means necessary that he should become the active person in it. A clergyman fitted for this undertaking may, especially if the premises lie convenient to his own residence, superintend it with little more expenditure of time and labour than some give to their National Schools.

A rare field of usefulness, my brief experience tells

me, lies open to a country clergyman who energetically carries out such a scheme. The future employers of labour in his neighbourhood, the future men of influence in surrounding parishes, come under his immediate care for years, receive from his training their early impressions and the direction of their characters, and become centres of propagation for new modes of thought and action.

Not that I would by any means recommend the hasty and indiscriminate adoption of such a plan as I have described; but the statement of the result of one such experiment might suggest to others to form some similar scheme of their own, and, diverging soon from the track which I have traced, they might follow out a different path, one which perhaps, like myself, they little dreamed of treading when they started.

Thus the once large and in its day famous school in our village came to a close, but not without having left behind it as its offspring a larger and far more important institution of a higher class, which had its origin in consequence of visits paid to the school at G——, which numbers already its hundred pupils and more, and which has for their accommodation the noble buildings, erected at the cost of many thousands, of Christ's College, Finchley.

Meanwhile our present school at G—— is, according to its earlier design, with the aid of a few boarders, self-supporting; seems well to harmonize, in its curtailed proportions, with the little village, all whose requirements it meets; and is doing its work under its faithful teacher, if less loudly and less widely, we hope not less efficiently.

X.

A RETROSPECT.

NOTES OF AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM, CHRISTMAS EVENING, 1860.

I PURPOSE to talk to you to-night, as has been our custom on Christmas evenings, about some of the matters in which, during the past year, you have had a common interest with your pastor.

Some of you have helped him, cheered, supported, encouraged, advised him; others, so far from doing this, have at least neglected your own opportunities.

But it is Christmas night, and dismissing all considerations but those of kindness for the past and hopefulness for the future, let our meeting breathe only a spirit suited to this season.

In such a spirit I desire to speak, and ask you to listen.

First.—Of the Church and its Services.—I shall have occasion to speak of other matters as I pass on;

but I am anxious to put the first things first, and the last things last, to make no confusion between things great and things small. Things may be good in their places, but their places be widely different.

A farmer trims his hedges, and cleans out his ditches; but this work, while he does not neglect it, he does not reckon of equal importance with the sowing of the seed.

The first duty then of the minister is the plain preaching of the truths of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ—by which I do not mean eloquent or clever preaching, preaching that tickles people's ears, or pleases their intellect, but the setting forth Christ's gospel in such language that an uneducated poor man, or a little child, may understand it. The glory of the gospel is that it is "preached to the poor." If they understand it, there is no fear of the learned not understanding if they wish to do so.

Indeed, if homely language be used, and the affairs of a Christian life be the subject of discourse, understanding is a question more of the heart than of the head. A Christian poor man knows what is meant when he is told that he is a sinner; that Christ is his Saviour; of the difficulty of maintaining a consistent Christian life, and of overcoming his natural corruption; of the help which God will give him in his sincere attempts to do so; of the way in which he must seek for that help; of the comforts, lessons, and assistances of the Holy Spirit; and of those hopes and glimpses of a brighter future which, like cordials, cheer the pilgrim's sometimes sinking spirit.

Amid much that is discouraging the faithful minis-

ter of Christ has from time to time the exceeding consolation of feeling that he is permitted to help God's people on thus; and I do hope that God may have so blessed His own word, through His minister's agency, to the comfort and progress of some amongst you, during the past year.

But that we may have the blessing of God's word, one thing is certain, *i. e.* that we must be where it is read and preached, and therefore I would press upon you all the simple duty of letting nothing interfere with your attending regularly at church.

Of course you might be all the worse even for this, if you were regular at God's house only in a Pharisaic spirit, placing your trust in your mere attendance; but, generally speaking, we may look for a blessing from a steady conscientious performance of this duty. If no rain fall on a bucket, if no water come near it, from very lack of moisture it will shrink and spoil; and just so there will be a dryness of soul, a withered state of feeling about religious things, in a man who wilfully neglects to hear the word of God read and preached, which there cannot well be about one who has a sufficient regard for God's day and God's house to keep him punctual in his observance of his Sabbath duties.

But, while I speak of the higher things, connected with our beloved House of God, I would not forget the lower.

I know how strongly many of you are attached to your own church. No cathedral would be to you what that humble church is. The peculiar circumstances of its building, the convenience of its form and arrangement for the purposes of worship, the remembrance that

it is the church in which your own souls, and those of your fathers before you, have been fed with the bread of life; these associations endear to you the very building itself. It is a worthy feeling. And it is to such a feeling that your minister owes it that he can acknowledge the gift of a beautiful new set of books, used for the first time to-day. Even the poorest may well have that feeling about their own house of God, and the things belonging to its service, which his loving servant had of old; "Shall I dwell in a house of cedar, and the Lord God between curtains?"

Other Services.—Week-day Lecture.—I know that it is often very difficult for a labouring man, or a man of business, to get his work over at a sufficiently early hour to enable him to attend a week-day evening lecture.

I do not sit in judgment on your several cases, and presume to say how far it is in the power of any of you to do this. You must be the judges of your own difficulties. "To your own master you stand or fall." The question is not one of satisfying me, nor one of my approval or disapproval. The more reason for your putting home the question to yourselves; "How far can my conscience acquit me if I neglect the opportunities which are afforded me?"

Let me suggest, however, that a week-day service is very useful for the following reasons:—

It comes in seasonably, midway between the intervals of Christian teaching, to remind you of the lessons learned on the Sabbath days.

It seems to claim, in an especial manner, the six days, as well as the one, for religion and for God,—declaring that they also are dedicated to Him, all their dealings subject to the same rules, all their labours devoted to the same ends.

It affords an opportunity of turning aside from the stream of worldly business to worship God.

I am sure that an attendance upon the week-day lecture, steadily persisted in, will be found by you most profitable. Still how far each one of you can continue to give it, I say again I will not undertake to decide for you. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

The Monday Evening Meetings.—You hear notice given every Sunday of a chapter of Scripture to be read at what, for want of a better term, we call a Bible meeting. The invitation to attend the meeting is to all who are communicants, or who wish to become so; all who, in the language of the exhortation to the Holy Communion, are "religiously and devoutly disposed." Those who are so disposed would, as a general rule, be communicants; but if, unknown to me, there should be any amongst you who are kept away from the Table of the Lord by scruples of conscience, I should be thankful to be treated by you with confidence, as your friend and minister, and consulted on the subject.

Our plan of proceeding is to read the chapter, verse by verse, in turn; to talk first over the particular portion of Scripture before us, and then to spend a few minutes

at the close in general conversation upon any subject of interest which any one present may like to bring forward.

Our object in meeting is twofold:

To improve our acquaintance with Holy Scripture;

And to foster a kindly sympathy between members of one Christian body.

Our common Father has given us a Book equally capable of supplying all our needs — equally capable of bestowing upon us all guidance and consolation — and we meet chiefly to help one another to understand and love that book, and to encourage one another to "keep the faith once delivered to the saints," and to adorn it by our lives and conversation.

May such, by the blessing of God, be the result of this and the other means of grace amongst us!

The Penny Bank.—There are other matters, on which I wish to speak to-night, beside the services.

A minister's work includes other things as well as direct spiritual teaching. Whatever bears, directly or indirectly, upon character, comes within his province; and what bears more upon it than schemes tending to promote industry, sobriety and economy?

Much benefit has resulted, especially in some thickly populated places, from the establishment of Penny Banks; and if you will consider the difference in comfort, self-respect, and power to do good, between a man in any rank of life who manages his income well, and one who is always in difficulties,—or, at best, in a muddle,—you will not wonder at the estimation in which some

hold them. A friend of mine, who has lately been staying in one of the mining districts, remarked to me on the contented look on the faces of the people. He supposed it to arise from their easy circumstances. But you know, my friends, as well as I, that he is the rich man who using well what he has, be it ever so little, has something to spare from it. Many workmen, very well off in point of wages, are as wretched and have homes as wretched as can be, simply for want, in the first instance, of being saving and provident.

Whatever, therefore, helps to economy and care is more useful than we can describe. I am very glad to see one pleasant feature in our own Penny Bank, which may be observed from a comparison of its half-yearly receipts, *i. e.* its steady growth. They are as follow:—

	£	*s.*	*d.*
First Half-year.			
From Michaelmas, 1858, to Lady-Day, 1859	14	4	0
Second Half-year.			
From Lady-Day, 1859, to Michaelmas, 1859	22	14	9
Third Half-year.			
From Michaelmas, 1859, to Lady-Day, 1860	16	14	1
Fourth Half-year.			
From Lady-Day, 1860, to Michaelmas, 1860	30	5	5

For the quarter from Michaelmas up to the present

time there is again a proportionate increase exactly similar.

Another subject upon which I am anxious to say a word is that of

The Allotments.—It is a great pleasure to sit in the school-room on rent nights, and to mark the regularity with which the payments are made, as well as to hear the good plain sense generally spoken by you upon matters with which you are acquainted, and in which you have an interest.

It is pleasant to superintend the distribution of John West's Easter Charity, and to hear the expressions of gratitude to the good old man, who, besides many other acts of benevolence towards his native place, supplies you all, even from his grave, with an abundant meal once every year.

But there is a sight more pleasant still than to see men helped by others; and that is, to see them, by their own forethought, self-denial and energy, helping themselves.

At this distance of time we can look back calmly and temperately upon a question which caused more excitement among us this year than any which has arisen since I have been your minister. I mean the question respecting the application of the Bacon Charity.

My opinion is, that we are not ultimately the worse for outspoken discussion upon questions about which we differ.

It has many advantages. It often is the means of revealing to us things in ourselves, and in one another, of

which we were ignorant, and which it is wholesome, however painful, for us to learn. I thank you all now for your general courtesy to me at a time when your feelings were strongly roused, and for your entire good-humour when the excitement had passed off; but at the same time I hope I may never forget one lesson to be learnt from the occurrence; *i. e.* to be quite indifferent, not to the manner nor to the spirit in which matters affecting your interests are conducted, but to your own judgment upon one's conduct.

"The reed shaken by the wind," who would be influenced by the fear of man, and not by the fear of God, would richly deserve, what he would assuredly soon get, man's hearty contempt. If, taking the word of God for our guide, all our conduct one towards another is regulated by the fear of God, one thing at least we shall have — one another's respect.

Had time permitted, I would have spoken of the schools, and especially of the Sunday School. I can omit the subject the more easily now as I have usually dwelt on this night, at some length, on points connected with them, and on the control which, if they are to reap the full benefits of the Schools, parents should exercise over their own children.

One word respecting the next use to which, out of its many public uses, our school-room will be put.

Twice in this past year we have met here for a social gathering on a large scale. We purpose so to meet again on Wednesday evening.

There are few changes in village life. Such a gathering is peculiarly appropriate to the season. Friends meet together now; social circles re-assemble; and is it not well that we, who are one flock, and should strive to realise the idea of one family, should do the same? It is but a little while that we shall be dwelling side by side. Putting aside all bitterness and jealousy and unseemly pride, let us strive, by friendly words and acts and feelings, to live as Christian friends and neighbours should live with one another.

I must express to you, in closing, most honestly, my sense of shortcoming; more especially as health has failed me much during the last two years.

On what may remain of future intercourse between us, I desire earnestly the blessing of God's Holy Spirit. Powerless indeed must every minister be without it.

Let me ask your prayers that this may be bestowed upon us, and let me this Christmas night urge you—

To increased faith in God:

You cannot live, even in childhood, without your difficulties, trials, cares, and troubles. Each age has its own. It is well when you feel them, and are driven by them home to your Father. He is your Father. Trust in Him. Trust in God. Trust Him, love Him, fear Him, and obey Him, as a reconciled Father — *your* Father!

To increased conflict with sin:

Keep the fight up. Begin it at once if you have

not yet done so; and if you have, never yield. Daily, hourly, fight the good fight of faith.

To increased diligence and freedom in prayer—that you may be forgiven all your sins through the blood of Christ, and serve Him by His grace, as those should serve Him who have a happy grateful sense of that forgiveness;

To which end have always the ladder of prayer up between you and heaven, for petitions to go up, for grace and help and mercy to come down.

And to obedience—watchful, careful, constant, to God's blessed commandments.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up; and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

T. C. W.

XI.

THE CLUB SERMON.

PREACHED MAY 23, 1860.

Matthew, xxi. 28, 29, 30, 31.

"*A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.*

He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went.

And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not.

Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first."

OF course there is a better kind of son than either of these. There is the son who says, "I go, sir," and at once goes to do his father's will. Happy is the man who has such a son as this; happy the man who is worthy of such a son.

A really good son will always be cheerfully obedient, unless indeed his father should require him to do some-

thing contrary to God's commandments. He may think that his father is hard upon him. The certain man may say, "Son, go work in my vineyard!" at a time when the son is tired or anxious to be doing something else. The best son is he who will go and work in the vineyard, without staying to dispute upon the matter.

But you know very well that all sons are not the best kind of sons. Often you may see a great difference in the children of the same family. A certain man has, it may be, two, three, or more children; and perhaps they are all different. One does whatever he is told in perfect good humour. Another begins, almost as soon as he can speak, to say, "I won't!" and "I shan't!" And another pretends to be obedient, but is nothing better than a deceitful little hypocrite from the beginning.

Some of you are parents, and know all this from experience; therefore you can form some idea of the variety of character and disposition that there is in the great family of which God is the universal Father.

The "certain man" in the parable is intended to represent God. This is the way our Lord, in His parables, brings home to our understanding the relationship of man to God. He says: "A certain man had two sons;" or, "A certain man had a vineyard, and employed labourers in it;" or, "A certain man made a feast, or a supper, and invited guests;" and so on. These are matters which we all understand. We understand — at least we think we understand — what are the principles which should regulate the behaviour one to another of parents and children, of employers and labourers, of hosts and guests. Perhaps we do not always understand even

these matters as well as we ought, or as well as we think we do; and that is why our Lord's parables, simple as they sound, are, in one sense, difficult to understand. He assumes in the hearer a sympathetic recognition of the principle or principles involved in them. Hence he seldom calls attention to the principle, seldom adds any practical application. "He that hath ears to hear," he says, "let him hear!" Those who have any sympathy with a principle are quick to recognise it, and to see how it applies to their highest duties. They whose hearts are not ready to receive the principle are but little benefited by a practical application; they may go away with the explanation upon their tongues, and talk readily enough about being children of God, and servants of God, and guests of God, and yet not understand the first principles of being either good parents or children, masters or servants, hosts or guests, of their fellow-creatures. If a man does not understand these principles, he does not know God. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

So when you hear of a certain man and his two sons, then begin to think of a certain man and his sons. By understanding the man and *his* sons, you the better understand the dealings of God with His sons, whether obedient or disobedient. At the same time bring to bear upon the certain man and his sons whatever knowledge of God's truth you may have in your own hearts and consciences.

Beware, however, of wresting the letter of the parable to your own destruction! You might even think you

see in the letter an encouragement to some of your own selfish ways and habits. Seek always the spirit in the Bible! To do that you must yourself have the spirit of the Bible. In other words, you must have the spirit of Christ and God. You will not obtain that by merely *reading* the Bible. You must pray over it, and meditate, and find out what God is doing with your own soul. You must ascertain what His Spirit has to do with your best convictions. The study of the Bible will help you to do this; and doing this will help you to study the Bible.

A wrong-headed man might think he could justify his wrong-headedness if he took only the letter of this parable, whereas the spirit of the parable condemns him. In every parable you must look mainly at the great lesson it intends to teach. You must search for the principle.

"I will not go!" said the first son; "but afterwards he repented, and went."

"I go, sir!" said the other; but "he went not."

"Whether of them twain," asks the Saviour, "did the will of his father?"

"They say unto him, the first."

Our Lord's next words justify their answer.

Suppose, now, a rude rough man, who hates being ordered about, no matter whether by a father or a master; — suppose him, as such a man sometimes is, to be honest and true at heart, and to have a general desire to do right; — suppose him to read this passage,—"Yes!" he might say, "that is just my sentiment! I don't like your smooth, soft-tongued man; he always does say, 'I

go, sir,' but he never goes. So much for outward pleasantness of manner! I will do my duty; but it shall be plainly seen that I do it at the bidding of my own conscience, and not because I am ordered. They shall see I can be independent if I please."

Such a man would be all wrong; and yet he might perhaps go away and say, "Well, if I *am* wrong, the Bible says I am right." It says nothing of the kind, if you look to the spirit and intention of the parable. The parable was clearly spoken not to praise this kind of man, but to condemn the other. Accordingly, to make His condemnation all the stronger, the Lord Jesus affirms, that even the man who says he will not go, and then goes, is better than the one who says, "I go, sir," and goes not. Then, turning to the Pharisees, He gave them to understand that they who were always talking so much about righteousness and religion, whilst they had really paid no attention to the warnings and commands of John the Baptist, were far worse than even the publicans and harlots, who did many of them hearken to John and finally repent, no matter what they had been. These did well to repent; but they had not done well to lead such bad lives. So there is no room here for any one to justify rudeness and insolence, calling it independence.

It is quite true that a rough independent manner sometimes conceals a genuine sterling heart; but a man may have the truest self-respect without a particle of rudeness. You may see men of high rank and station, who think it necessary, by way of asserting their independence, to insult those who are in authority over

them; and you may see labouring men who, without truckling to any one, are invariably civil, respectful, and manly. Again, you may find real humility beneath the "gay clothing," and the most offensive pride beneath the "vile raiment."

It may be of the less consequence to urge here, in the house of God, that the civil, respectful man, most gains the esteem and affection of his fellow-men; but it is proper to be saying here that he whose heart is right with God *will* be decent and respectful in his outward conduct, and will never be rough and insolent if he can help it — I say *if he can help it*, because there are some who now and then, from natural awkwardness of manner, cannot help seeming rude; but this is a very different thing from purposely being so, and taking a delight in it.

But in laying no stress upon the gaining of the good-will of our fellow-men, one must not be supposed to undervalue this good-will. All that is meant is that it ought not to be too much insisted upon as a motive of conduct. You see what it sometimes leads to by the case of the second son. It may lead to unreality. "I go, sir," said he, willing to *seem* obedient, "but he went not." You surely know something about this kind of man. At least you know him when he is bad of his kind. So well can he talk, that he trusts to his tongue to conceal or excuse the shortcomings of his hand. "I go, sir!" comes readily from his lips upon any and every occasion. A poor creature enough, when you know him. But what if you do not know him? Why, then, forsooth he is very pleasant; a model son, a pattern servant

a treasure of a friend. It is all very well, and very easy, for us to condemn him when we read of him in the parable, where our Saviour strips him bare of all his plausible arts and devices, and represents him as nothing better than a hypocrite and a liar; but if we ourselves had seen and heard him, we should very likely have been completely deceived by his pretences and excuses, and either we should never have known he did not go into the vineyard at all, or he would have made it very clear to us that it was all the better that he did not.

The Scribes and Pharisees, against whom this parable was spoken, were generally supposed to work very hard and very successfully in God's vineyard. It was only when there came one like the Lord Jesus, who could see them through and through, that they stood abashed and convicted.

The certain man in the parable may not have had any accurate knowledge of the real characters of his two sons. He may have gone on issuing his commands, always disliking the rough manner of the one son, and always pleased with the obsequiousness of the other, never finding out that his rough rude son was after all the most obedient of the two. If so, he was like many other fathers, and like many masters too.

Fathers and masters, and indeed all who are placed in authority, are as liable as sons and servants to misconceive the spirit of the parable. "Yes," they may say; "we perceive that the certain man with his sons and his servants represents God with His sons and

servants. God's commands are to be obeyed; our commands are to be obeyed. God prefers those who obey Him; we prefer those who obey us." They may quite forget that although the certain man resembles God in having sons and servants, it is possible that he may resemble God in nothing else. There is a parable where God is likened to an unjust judge. The judge resembled God only in being a judge; but in being an unjust judge he was not like God at all. Even so, for a father or a master to be really like God, he must be of the same character as God; in short, he must have the spirit of God, the same spirit that was in Jesus Christ, the spirit of wisdom, and of justice, and of love. He must not go about issuing hard and arbitrary commands, according to the dictates of his own mere caprice. So surely as he does that he will often provoke disobedience, or at least the appearance of it, in those who do not really wish to be disobedient; and he will seem to be obeyed by those who do not seriously wish to obey him. And then, forasmuch as he cannot, like God, see the heart, the plausible pliant son or servant will be his favourite, and the rough honest son or servant will always be disliked by him. Enough has been said to the effect that the rough honest man must not be rude and obstinate; but, on the other hand, those who are in authority must keep watch over themselves, over their own conduct, and especially over their own motives. It is so natural to prefer the child who seems to give you no trouble. Of course you do not like a child to say, "I won't!" and "I shan't!" But when a child says that,

if you are merely angry because he opposes *your* will, and if, for that reason only, you go on to be hard and harsh, you do certainly lessen your chance of securing a right influence over him as years roll on. We all of us, more or less, encourage the notion that what we call *sulkiness* in a child is all his own fault and none of ours. But suppose he is naturally of a silent, shy, reserved disposition, and we *will* try to make him talk and altogether outwardly behave as we desire; we may then make him worse. Such a child often has a keen sense of justice. He wants to know the reason of things. We do not trouble ourselves to be just or reasonable. We like the child that gives in at once, and we favour and pet him, never thinking that it may be mere indolence, or a wish to be petted and flattered, that makes him seem to be obedient. He grows up with no true character of his own, because we have stamped a certain outward character upon him. We very often do not sufficiently study the characters, or educate the consciences, either of children, or of servants, or indeed of any who are placed under us. Some there may be who are not to be controlled by anything but force; but it is well to try and rule every one, unless he be reprobate, as much possible through his own conscience. The Lord God Himself, whilst giving us an outward law, desires that we should obey it by reason of our conscience, under the influence of His spirit, approving it. "Love," says St. Paul, "is the fulfilling of the law." Of course it requires a great deal of patience and wisdom in a father or a master to look for this sort of obedience; but it is

well worth all the trouble of seeking and waiting for it. It may not produce immediate effects. You have often to hear "I will not," where you would have preferred to hear "I will, sir;" but the obedience, when it does come in due time, is of the right sort, and tends to make a true and real character.

The principle of authority here laid down is a very important one, and one which we all need to study. Therefore when we read in the parable, "A certain man had two sons," and think to ourselves that the certain man represents God, let us not begin with ourselves and our own authority, saying, "Yes, of course we must and will be obeyed, whatever we command; for are not we and our authority taken as an illustration of God and His authority?" But let us begin with God and His authority, and His way of exercising it; and let us say, "The certain man can only be a true illustration of God, so far as he is like God, and has the character of God, and exercises authority and influence in God's own way." And if we want to know how to be like God, then surely we know, or ought to know, that there is but one way, viz. to have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, the express image of His Father.

Hence the conclusion of the whole matter is, that I must direct you to Jesus Christ, and must plainly say, that there is no such thing as being a good father, a good master, a good guardian, or anything of the kind, unless you are a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus, walking in His ways and filled with His spirit. You

know how He dealt with those who said to Him, "I will not." Weak perverse human nature does say "I will not" to God's law. Jesus Christ overcame this weakness and perverseness by patience, and love, and self-sacrifice, even unto death. He consented to be lifted up that He might draw all men unto Him and unto His Father. Whoever then among you wishes to be God's instrument to produce true work in His vineyard, must learn to know God through Jesus Christ, and to be like God by being one with Christ. In this way alone can you learn that self-discipline which is the first requisite for disciplining men aright. By any other way you can only do an outside work. You cannot otherwise influence or guide human hearts to a true sense either of duty or of happiness.

Seek then to please God!

By so doing, you may or you may not please men. It will depend upon circumstances. It will depend upon what is God's purpose with you.

God may have some purpose to fulfil by causing you to please your fellow-men. It will be with you then, as it says in the Scripture, "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

On the other hand, it may be the Lord's purpose to make you an object of dislike to your fellow-men. It may be necessary that you should fail in obtaining the good-will of those whom you most wish to please. It may be your destiny to give offence to those whom you desire to have for your best friends. From the

highest point of view, this is really no business of yours, one way or the other. You must follow out your course, lead where it may. It is God, and not man, whose approval is of principal consequence to you.

Study therefore to please God! There is but one way to that. Seek the principles of His Gospel and the spirit of His Son!

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